

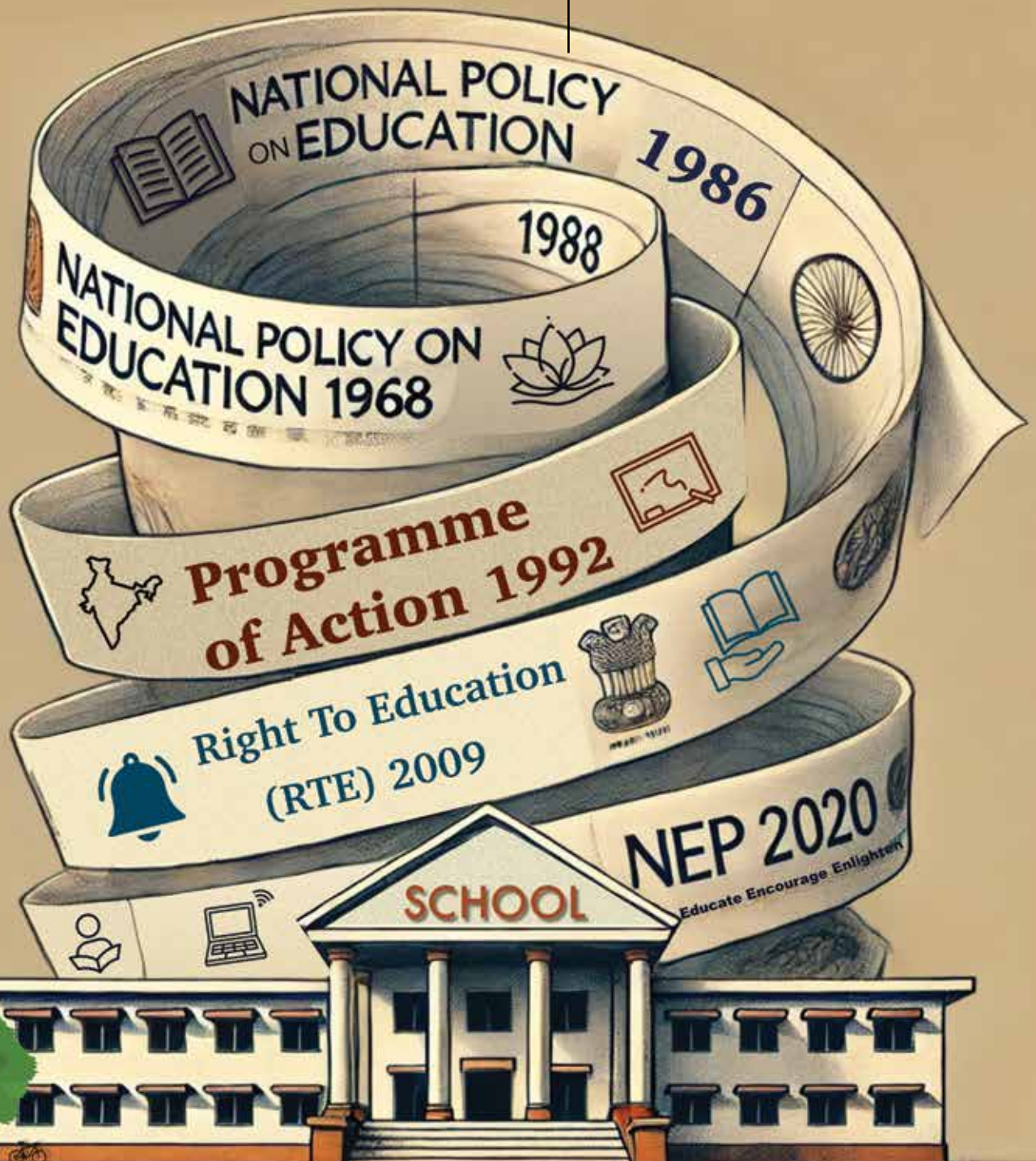
the magazine for
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Megha Bajaj

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India's education system is one of the largest in the world, but its scale presents immense challenges. Despite high enrollment rates, quality outcomes remain a concern. Vignesh Krishnan writes about the strengths and weaknesses of the government education system, asking whether it's time for private organizations to step in. While Fiona Vaz explores how and why private schools have become synonymous with quality education, despite data showing only a slight edge over their government counterparts.

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**Cover: Education and the
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Structure, control, and flexibility



No matter what the role, I suspect that most of us veer between a need for structure, a sense of order and clear boundaries, and the freedom of flexibility and space to move things around, to push those boundaries a bit, or even break them, and the excitement of disorder. It's like the promise of an evening out at a familiar restaurant where we know we can experiment a bit in the certain knowledge that there will be the usual favourite dishes to come back to if we so desire. As teachers, this ambivalence – this co-existing desire for order and disorder – expresses itself in our syllabi and lesson plans, which offer a clear pathway to where we need to go with our teaching while also holding space for the minor adjustments that must be made for individual students and gives us some room to account for the mood of the group. We – and our students – are steadied by the presence of the map, yet can feel the power of holding the steering wheel as we manage the speed of the journey.

As someone who teaches at the university level, I may have a little more flexibility than the average school teacher in navigating that space between the structure of a course outline and its customized implementation in the classroom. In a recent class, for instance, I went in with my prepared presentation, and an activity planned out, with clear time allocation for the doing and the discussion. But five minutes into the class, a question threw us off course, and a discussion ensued that went in many fascinating directions, none of which had anything to do (ostensibly) with the planned lesson. If I had insisted on returning to my PowerPoint slides, or on shepherding the 50 students back into an activity that now seemed irrelevant, I would have lost the opportunity to let them explore a different set of ideas that seem to have captured their imagination. So, I let it go, and instead focused my energies on drawing from this unplanned discussion a different set of points that could be tied back to the larger goals of the course.

At the institutional level, the responsibility is to provide sufficient structure so that individuals can perform their roles with creativity and a degree of flexibility. This structure can be physical – walls around classrooms, or dividing different parts of the school – as well as conceptual – scheduling the day or the week. It can take the form of rules and regulations that mirror the expectations of society and state.

But even as we respect those boundaries, observe the rules, and cooperatively work by the regulations, it's important that we find and keep the spaces we can for our own little digressions, our own interpretation of what is possible, and what is doable. Those are the spaces where innovation resides, and surprises emerge. And while we may return to the overarching structure routinely, and even feel comforted and anchored by it, we do so with a bit of bounce, an energy that comes from the unexpected flavour of experimentation.

Usha Raman

Unveiling the magic of math

Anuradha Veruva

Photos courtesy: Anuradha Veruva



Generating sequences using musical instruments.

Math can be scary for many students, like a hidden monster in their education journey. But what if we could change this view and show them that math is actually a helpful guide, lighting the way to understanding the world? This article looks at how fun activities can connect abstract ideas with real-life situations, helping students develop a love for math.

In my math lessons, I have woven real-life situations into the fabric of learning, transforming it from a solitary subject into a comforting companion, much like a mother's presence. Just as a mother patiently guides her child to understand the importance of food, I strive to guide my students in discovering the inherent beauty and relevance of mathematical applications.

Imagine a classroom filled with excitement as students embark on a shopping adventure. Armed with lists and discount flyers, they utilize mathematical tools such as addition, subtraction, and percentages to maximize their savings. This

interactive experience goes beyond a simple math lesson; it becomes a journey of empowerment, equipping students with valuable real-world skills.

Beyond the confines of the classroom, I have discovered that nurturing a school garden provides a fascinating platform for comprehending fractions and proportions. Witnessing students transform into miniature botanists is truly rewarding. They carefully measure water using division and employ problem-solving skills to ensure the growth and wellbeing of their green companions. Through this experience, a sense of responsibility blossoms, enhancing not only their mathematical proficiency but also cultivating a newfound appreciation for nature and resource management. As a facilitator, it is a truly enriching experience.

I have also discovered that concepts like Least Common Multiple (LCM) and Highest Common Factor (HCF) become less intimidating when presented in relatable scenarios. To illustrate this, I recently gave each student two pieces of clothing

and asked them to cut equal and maximum length pieces from both garments. This activity not only reinforces their understanding of math, but also teaches them valuable lessons about resource management and minimizing waste.

Similarly, I have engaged my students in an activity involving coloured beads. I asked them to form a repeated pattern using the beads and challenged them to determine the least number of beads needed for the pattern. Through this hands-on exploration, students were able to grasp the concept of Least Common Multiple (LCM) and apply it to real-life situations.

I organized my students into teams and had them synchronize their claps based on multiples of 2 and 3. The excitement grew as they worked together to reach the Least Common Multiple, strengthening their understanding through this interactive and engaging activity. This not only develops their problem-solving skills, but also fosters collaboration and communication among students as they learn from and support one another. Just like a mother guiding her child's first steps, I strive to create a safe and supportive environment for exploration in my classroom.



As they engage in activities like arranging plants in rows and columns without leaving empty spaces, they begin to understand different types of numbers such as primes, squares, and factors. As they embark on this journey of discovery, I see them evolve from passive learners to active participants, forever engraving the magic of numbers on their hearts.

By encouraging students to experiment, collaborate, and make their own discoveries, I empower them to embark on a personalized journey of mathematical exploration. This hands-on approach ignites their curiosity and transforms math from a common subject into a captivating and thrilling adventure.

When I help students connect math to their everyday experiences, I witness them acquiring valuable skills and developing a love for learning that extends beyond the classroom walls. So, let us break the misconception of math being a monster and embrace its true potential as a tool for lifelong learning and empowerment.

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Children and EQ

How to use emotions as super powers

Megha Bajaj

Did you know that we have two brains, two minds, and two intelligences*? One is rational and the other is emotional. And they are two totally different kinds of intelligences.

The theory of EQ is considered rather profound and complex. However, if we dig a bit deeper, we find that there are ways to simplify it and make it practical. EQ advocates working closely with our emotions. A new-born baby arrives with an array of emotions that unfold step-by-step through various life experiences. Although limited at the beginning, by the end of the third year, children display a full range of human emotions.

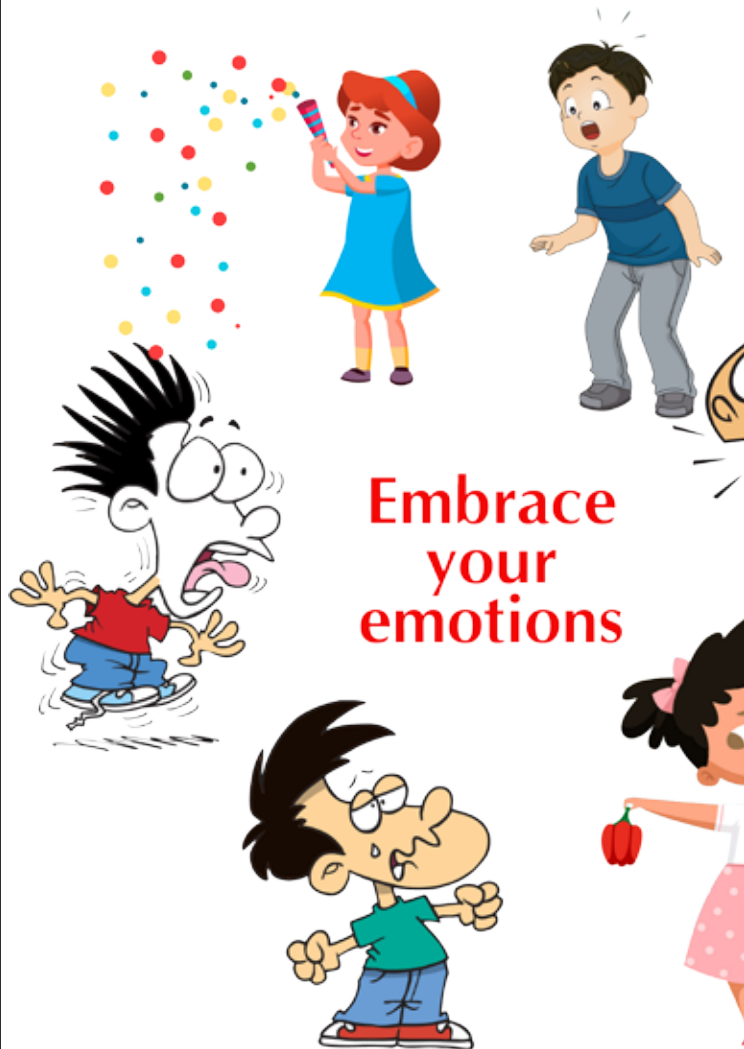
The term EI first appeared in 1964, but it was in 1995 that the concept of EQ gained attention when Daniel Goleman, American author, psychologist, and science journalist, reported on the brain and behavioural sciences in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. The theory of Six Basic Human Emotions by Paul Ekman of fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust, and surprise also resurfaced. Interestingly, these human emotions are also deeply embedded in our Vedic literature. Emotions, then, have always been around – validated by both science and spirituality.

With Emotional Intelligence (EQ) becoming so important, the question then is, 'How do we create emotionally intelligent children?'

Children are a bundle of intense energy. If we ever want to understand emotions in their purest form, it is through children. They are a representation of what every emotion is supposed to be. Raw and real. And

this is why, the best time to build EQ is early and every day.

Building EQ is a process. When babies coo, they are communicating. When infants cry they are sharing a message. When toddlers throw tantrums, they are sharing confusion. When pre-schoolers shout, they are sharing discomfort. In school, college, and life as an adult, everybody uses emotions to communicate.



*"In a sense we have two brains, two minds – and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both – it is not just IQ, but emotional intelligence that matters. Indeed, intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence. Ordinarily the complementarity of limbic system and neocortex, amygdala and prefrontal lobes, means each is a full partner in mental life. When these partners interact well, emotional intelligence rises – as does intellectual ability."

– Daniel Goleman

It is not just a parent's or teacher's job to build emotionally intelligent children, it is a collective responsibility. Here is how we can start.

1. **Talking about emotions:** There is no perfect age to talk about emotions. Emotions are a part of our everyday life, hence we should talk about them every day. Ask questions such as, "How are you feeling today?", "What happens if you listen to a sad story?", "What makes you happy – music or playing with friends?" The purpose is to normalize talking about how children are feeling at home and in school.

Tip: Use stories. Stories are great conversation starters.

2. **Adding words to every emotion:** The way adults feel anger is different from how children experience it. EQ is to bring awareness to how one 'feels' a specific emotion. With children, parents and teachers can begin by defining one emotion at a time. For e.g., Ask questions such as "What do you do when you feel happy?", "What happens when you feel scared?" Or "What do you mean when you say you are feeling sad?" The idea is to help children identify what happiness and sadness mean to them as these are unique experiences.

Tip: Begin with one powerful question every day, "What was your most dominant feeling today?"

3. **Sharing your own emotions:** As adults, we are conditioned to suppress our emotions in front of our children. Children learn through observation. The best way to open channels to bring EQ in everyday life is to share your own vulnerabilities with children. The more teachers and parents share how they feel about their own behaviour and that of others, the easier it will be for children to understand that it is natural, and they will, in turn, learn to own, express, and channelize their emotions.

Tip: Use everyday situations to talk about emotions. Worksheets, creative activities, and videos add value, but the simplest way to begin is to just be honest with children about how you are feeling.

4. **Responding rather than reacting!** Awareness is everything. One classic way to help children build a strong EQ is to help them deal with their emotions gently. Let them know that it is okay to feel jealous, angry, sad, and embarrassed. But, teach them age-appropriate ways to express the

same emotions in a healthy manner. For e.g., pausing before reacting, asking for help, sharing with someone close, and finding ways to put your feelings in words. A child can be taught that when he or she is angry, instead of hitting someone or screaming, they can simply express what made them angry.

Tip: Art, stories, and interaction – all have a key role to play here.

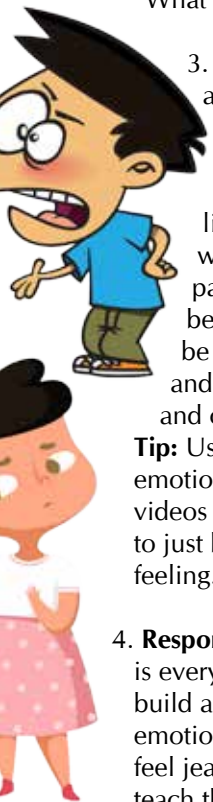
5. **Emotions are tools:** The children of today are quick absorbers and have higher processing speeds. Emotions can be powerful tools that can be used every day. They are the secret to understanding friends, sharing ideas in groups, dealing with failures, and also being successful in everyday goals. The more we show children the potency of emotions, the more they will learn to channelize them and use them to their benefit.

Tip: Share examples of inspiring stories of people who have achieved goals through mental strength and hard work. For example, how para-athletes choose to pursue their passions despite odds through self-belief and by being positive. Explain to children how emotions are powerful tools that can be used to build themselves, their relationships, and life.

The only way to help children learn about emotions is to simplify them – raising the awareness levels to something that is familiar to them. To stay open and vulnerable and let children know that it's okay. To feel love. To feel resentment. To be happy and sad. Peaceful and angry. We go through the entire gamut – so why deny it to our young ones?

Every exchange that children have with their parents, teachers, and friends are moments of profound possibilities – for them to accept and embrace emotions, to channelize and use this power to build the best versions of themselves. Emotion is energy in motion – let's direct it to our young ones in the right manner!

The writer is a bestselling author of several books, including, *The Breakthrough* published by Rupa Publications. She is a TEDx Speaker, an author-mentor, a passionate edupreneur, and an ardent seeker. She was among the 50 Most Influential Authors mentioned by Delhi Wire and 25 Most Inspiring Women in Mumbai. Her company WoW (Wonders of Words) conducts notable programs like the WoW Online Writing and Healing Workshop as well as WoW 3Ls (Language + Life + Leadership Skills) Program. She can be reached at info@wondersofwords.org or know more about her at www.MeghaBajajWoW.com > .



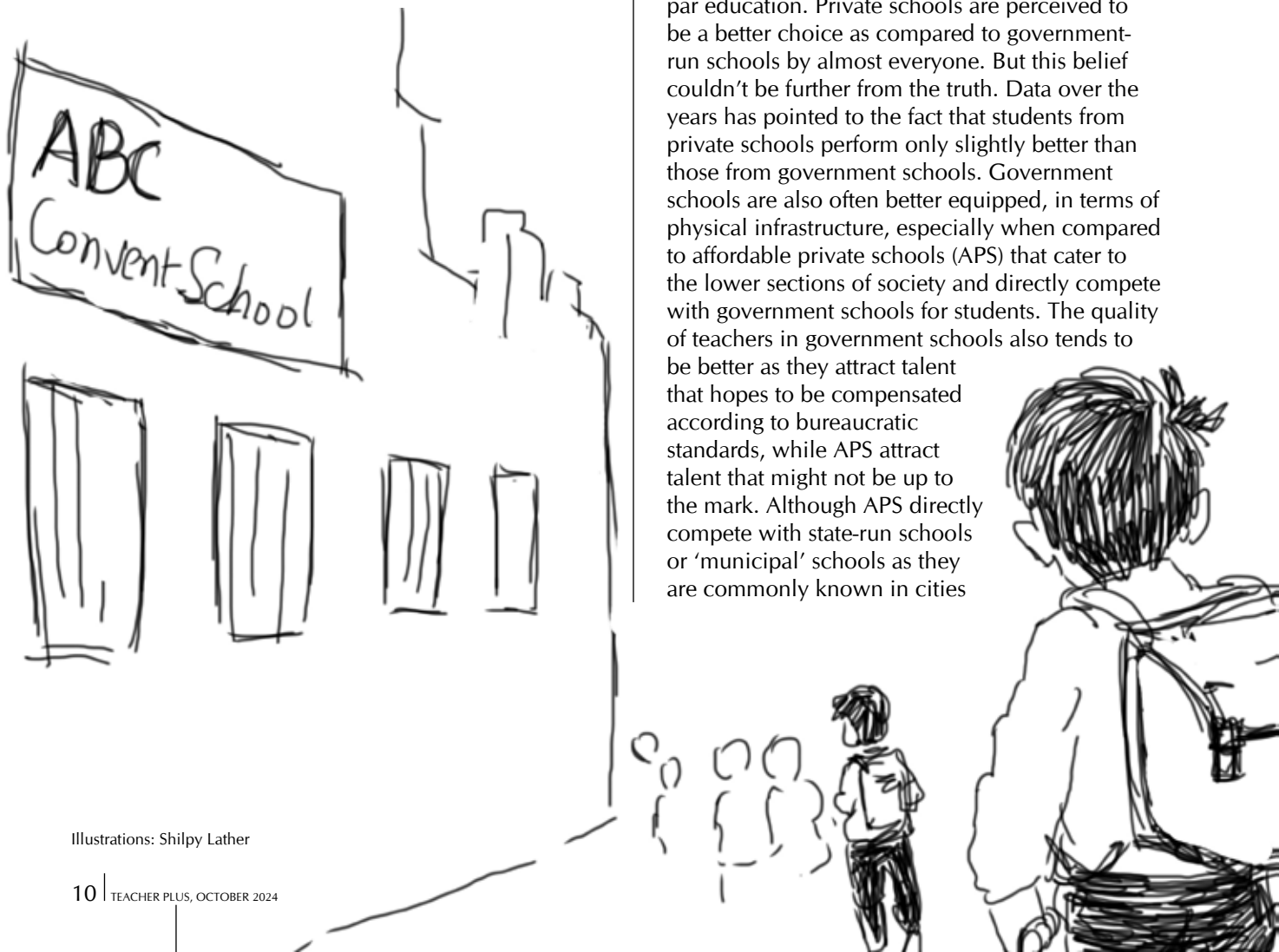
Private schools and the government: a symbiotic relationship?

Fiona Vaz

A few years ago, when I was working at an NGO that partnered with governments to run municipal schools, one of the oft-repeated requests from parents was to change the name of the government school to make it sound more 'private'. Parents wanted the foundation's name to be officially added to the school's name, as they believed it would convey that their children received quality education in that school. As staff members, in a public private partnership (PPP) model, we also knew that some of our 'brightest' students, who were

enrolled in the kindergarten, were only spending time in our classrooms until they secured admission in coveted private schools nearby. We had heard of students being ashamed to walk on the roads in their municipal school uniforms as they would be looked down on by their peers who attended private schools.

For the past few decades there has been a narrative that private schools provide quality education while government schools provide dismal or sub-par education. Private schools are perceived to be a better choice as compared to government-run schools by almost everyone. But this belief couldn't be further from the truth. Data over the years has pointed to the fact that students from private schools perform only slightly better than those from government schools. Government schools are also often better equipped, in terms of physical infrastructure, especially when compared to affordable private schools (APS) that cater to the lower sections of society and directly compete with government schools for students. The quality of teachers in government schools also tends to be better as they attract talent that hopes to be compensated according to bureaucratic standards, while APS attract talent that might not be up to the mark. Although APS directly compete with state-run schools or 'municipal' schools as they are commonly known in cities



Illustrations: Shilpy Lather

like Mumbai, it would be erroneous to believe that they are only for the poor. Government schools are for everyone, including the more affluent sections of society. However, the idea that affluent parents would enroll their children in government schools is unthinkable today. This economic division contributes to the erosion of political support for education as a right, imparted freely to all, in government schools.

If government schools are critical for children to access their right to free and compulsory education, then it might help to interrogate the relationship between governments and private schools. In this article, we will look at the evolution of the private school as it is today and how the government might have contributed to the environment that enables the proliferation of private schools at every budget level. We will also look at the relationships that governments maintain with private schools and how that might affect our ideas around education at large.

Education as a right

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), one of the first conventions of its kind, passed in 1948, states that education is a fundamental right and that it must be freely available to all, at least until elementary stages. India is a signatory to the UDHR, which means that it believes that children should have access to free and quality education at the primary school level. The Right to Education Act, passed by the Government of India, in 2009, made free and compulsory education to all children until the age of 14, a right. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which in its previous avatar was the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), had various articles, similarly advocating a rights-based approach to education. However, if education is a right, as accepted and endorsed by the government, then we must examine the reasons why private schools provide education as a commodity to students. It would be helpful to see the role of the state in enabling the rise of private schools at practically every budget and to interrogate how private schools came to enjoy the distinction of being an obvious and only choice, for parents and communities, in many social circles.

Private schools and the government

Narrative of quality education

In the 1990s, at the time that India's economy was liberalized, the conditions encouraged the establishment of a number of private schools to meet the demands of the middle and lower-income classes for private education. Private schools have

always existed in India and some were supported by the government as government-aided schools. Such schools received the support of the government often through funds for teacher salaries, while they continued to be run by private or religious entities. Around the 1970s-80s, the middle class in India had already begun their flight from government schools to private schools. Government schools did have issues such as high teacher absenteeism and poor infrastructure, thus strengthening the public perception of them being of low quality. This perception fuelled the demand for private schools in the 90s, even among the lower income classes, as they imitated the choices of the middle class.

Dr Shalini Bhorkar, currently teaches at St Mary's University, UK and is an expert on privatization of education in India and other developing countries. For her doctoral research, Dr Bhorkar focused on private tutoring and its role in advancing educational inequity in India. Dr Bhorkar found, through her research, that owing to the high demand for private schools in the 90s, several providers of private schools (including state education department and other government employees, and private tuition and coaching class providers) came into existence. "These people, who had some insider knowledge about schooling and/or school education felt incentivized to start private schools, sometimes because of the prestige of becoming school principals." As such, many other players entered the space of private school education and APS began to grow and so also the exodus from government schools. Dr Bhorkar says that the government did not do anything specific to support the proliferation of private schools, but it contributed to reducing the pressure to improve public schools, which furthered parents' beliefs that private schools are better than public ones.

"The government school needs children to function. Often, when private players lead to decrease in the number of children attending government schools, it further results in a subsequent reduction in the government's motivation to improve the schools. This resulted in a vicious cycle, whereas the number of students enrolling in government schools continued to decline, the perception about its quality continued to deteriorate too, which meant that many students migrated to private schools and further negatively affected the enrollment levels of children in government schools in many regions," says Dr Bhorkar.

Regulations and control of private schools

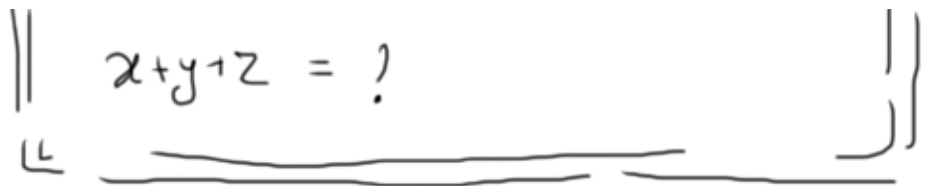
The Right to Education Act (RTE) passed by the

Government of India in 2009 tried to regulate private schools in different ways. The RTE tried to control, among others, three key aspects in private schools namely their founding, the quality of teachers therein, and inclusion of students from economically weaker sections of society (EWS). Within these three areas especially, one could see considerable engagement between the State and private schools.

According to the RTE, schools had to be registered, if they were already in existence and also if they were being newly set up. The requirements for registration, among others, were that the school had to have infrastructure such as a playground, separate toilets for students according to their gender, a kitchen, barrier-free access to and adequate classrooms. The act mandated that the schools are run as not-for-profits in order to check the amount they might charge as fees from parents. However, it is no surprise that schools require money for the upkeep of their infrastructure, to pay teacher and staff salaries as well as fulfill other costs that are incurred. It is not possible to meet these expenses without charging high fees and when the fees charged are low, the quality of the schooling experience suffers. Here, we can see that students are treated as customers, in that

what you pay for is what you get and not as bearers of rights.

In addition, and sadly, the quality and accountability mechanisms that were introduced by the RTE, now are being weakened with the inevitable implementation of the National Education Policy (2020) across states. The NEP, as it has come to be known, suggests that private schools need not have the requisite infrastructure, accessible classrooms or playgrounds especially in urban areas where land is scarce and costly. It also suggests that the Directorate of School Education, which previously regulated private schools, will no longer regulate them, but private schools will be required to self-disclose basic regulatory information. They will also be accountable to an independent state-wide body called the State School Standards Authority (SSSA) for 'minimal' and 'basic' parameters of quality and safety. Students, who are paying for an education, have to now make do with 'basic' and 'minimal' quality and safety under the new policy of the government. The government, through the NEP continues to loosen its control over private schools by undoing the provisions of the RTE and abdicating its position as a guardian of children's rights.


$$x + y + z = ?$$

The Government of India also has a strict control on the quality of teachers through the RTE. The RTE mandates that teachers in private schools have to be adequately qualified. However, adequate qualification in some cases could mean the most minimal and in other cases could also mean falsification of educational qualification to supplicate government authorities. As per Transparency International, an organization reporting on global corruption, India is one of the highest-ranking countries for the prevalence of transgressional practices in the public sector¹ and schools could be bribing state educational officers to provide them recognition on the basis of teacher qualification.

Another area that private schools were in continuous engagement with the government was over the 25 percent RTE quota for students belonging to EWS. The RTE mandated that private schools reserve 25 percent of their total seats in the first year of schooling for students who belonged to the EWS of society. Since its adoption by different states, schools, especially those that are self-funded, have conflicted or flouted the norms for filling the seats with students from EWS of society. Private schools have pointed out that they are reimbursed late by the government for these seats and face challenges integrating students in the school. The pushback from private schools on this matter continues until today with them asking for various exemptions in the courts of law.

Private schools as aiding government efforts: some concluding reflections

As mentioned earlier, private schools have been in existence in India even prior to India's independence. Mostly existing as charitable organizations, these schools often run by religious missionaries, social thinkers, and reformers, played a significant role in developing the future citizenry of a young nation. Today, private schools play a role in supporting the government in expanding education to the large number of students in the country. Some private schools partner with government school departments to share best practices and teacher

training. Sanyukta Bafna of The Acres Foundation points to her team's enthusiasm to work with state governments to take their innovative curriculum to a large number of students. Others also mandate their students to work with neighbourhood government schools or APS as part of their social outreach programmes. Proponents share that private schools are able to create competition and thus force development of state-run schools. However, this has not been the case. If anything, private schools and those who support the commodification of education have weakened the political will to improve state-run facilities. In addition, private schools have led to a stratification based on economic class, gender, and caste as data suggests that most private schools are attended by those who are better off, male, and belong to upper castes². By refusing governmental policies for inclusion such as the 25 percent reservation of EWS, private schools strengthen their position as institutions only for a homogenous group of people – mainly the middle class and elite.

Rishi Sunak, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was similarly educated in an elite private school and was perceived as out of touch by the public precisely because of the lack of diverse views in his formative years. Sunak's policies seemed to benefit only the rich while burdening the poor and the working class, which hastened his removal. His private schooling and continuing education, seemed to narrow his vision of welfare and we need to think if it does the same here. Are private schools, inadvertently, eroding the government system that they were meant to support?

As I mention that private schools and governments could have a symbiotic relationship where one's growth affects the other, Dr Bhorkar is quick to correct me. Private schools and the Government of India have a very complex relationship and cannot be defined in a straightforward manner, and it would be misleading to call this relationship "symbiotic", she says.

As I continue to reflect on these issues, I would ask, how can we make the relationship between the state and private schools more symbiotic and mutually fulfilling?

The author is the co-founder and director of InteGRAL, a gender focused research and consulting firm. She can be reached at <fiona@integral-asia.org>.

1. Express News Service. (2024, January 31). Corruption Index: India ranks 93 among 180 nations. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-corruption-index-cpi-2023-corruption-perceptions-index-public-sector-corruption-9135717/>.

2. Bagde, S. Eppe, D. Taylor, L., (2022). The emergence of private high schools in India: The impact of public-private competition on public school students. *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol (215), 2022, 104749, ISSN 0047-2727, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2022.104749>.

Making the elephant dance: unpacking India's public education system

Vignesh Krishnan

India's education system is nothing short of monumental. There are over 264 million enrolled students studying across 1.5 million schools in India (UDISE, 2020-21). Over the past decade, we have made remarkable strides, achieving over 97% enrollment at the primary level. However, the sheer scale of this system presents a daunting challenge: in such a grand scale of things, how do we make sense of the system and make it work efficiently?

In this article lie glimpses of some critical threads on what works and does not work in the government system. It also explores whether the government should hold full responsibility for all aspects of school education in India and the role that private non-state actors – non-profit organizations, foundations, and private companies – can play in improving the quality of education. Unpacking the gears of India's education machinery, we will navigate this fine line between governmental scale and private innovation to understand how both sides can converge into an effective educational ecosystem.

The government machinery: potential and pitfalls

At the heart of India's education system lies a complex government machinery, designed to reach every corner of this vast and diverse nation. The system operates on a concurrent model, with responsibilities shared between the central and state governments. While this structure aims to ensure comprehensive coverage, it often results in a fragmented approach to policy implementation.

The central government, through bodies like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), sets academic standards and regulates curricula. However, the work of actually deploying these things happens at the state level. This is what often causes a disconnect between

policy and practice, with most states finding it tough to translate central directions into implementation on the ground (Kingdon 2007).

One of the key challenges in making this system work efficiently is the misalignment of resources and outcomes. Between 2008 and 2015, per-pupil expenditure in India increased significantly from ₹6,000 to ₹19,000 (MHRD, 2018). Yet, during this same period, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reported a decline in basic learning outcomes (ASER Centre, 2016). This period also saw the rise of large-scale non-profit organizations focused on systemic reforms, supported by increased private and international funding. Dasra, a leading non-profit systems orchestrator, reports that CSR funding for education alone grew by 27% between 2014 and 2018, reflecting the growing attention towards education reform. The learning crisis remains a key topic of dialogue and action among both state and non-state actors, even in 2024. This paradox underscores a crucial lesson: increased funding alone cannot solve the efficiency crisis in education.

One wonders, why quality in education is still falling short, despite several measures taken by the government and private non-state actors. While there are several layered reasons as to why quality continues to be a cause of concern, an important question to ask is what might the government do differently to bring a shift in outcomes?

Streamlining government efforts: towards outcome-driven governance

While we have witnessed an overall jump in budget allocation for school education across states, a large part of it is typically spent on teacher salaries and infrastructure needs, not on student progress or improvements in learning. To make the government system work more efficiently, there needs to be a paradigm shift towards outcome-driven governance.



This approach requires a fundamental change in how success is measured and resources are allocated.

The central government has begun to recognize the potential of outcomes-based funding (ObF). In her FY 2023-24 budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman announced the government's intention to pilot ObF programs, signalling a national shift towards linking funding with results. By implementing such ObF interventions, the government can determine what works best and how these models can be integrated into procurement processes to maximize impact.

Delhi's education reform is a great example of a government making a concerted effort to push for better outcomes. One of the landmark decisions by the Government of Delhi was to make a significant jump in budget allocation to 25% of the total budget, becoming the one state that touched that high level of allocation. While there is criticism that the Government of Delhi mostly spent the money on building new schools and classrooms, there were several programs targeted towards building model schools, upskilling principals and incentivising high performing teachers in the system in the form of awards.

Another critical area for improvement is reducing the administrative burden on teachers. A study by the Azim Premji Foundation (2017) found that teachers

in government schools spend a disproportionate amount of time on non-teaching tasks, from data collection to managing mid-day meal records. Streamlining these processes and providing administrative support can free up teachers to focus on their core responsibility: teaching.

NITI Aayog's School Education Quality Index (SEQI) is a great example of an initiative aimed at driving improvements in education by focusing on outcomes rather than mere inputs. The SEQI seeks to institutionalize a ranking system where learning, access, and equity become the core objectives of school education policy in India. Recognizing that education is largely a state subject, this index encourages states to take ownership and leadership in advancing education outcomes in cost-effective ways. By annually measuring and ranking states based on governance indicators, the SEQI highlights state-led innovations and best practices, fostering a competitive spirit and encouraging continuous improvement. This shift in policy focus is essential for strengthening government systems, as it emphasizes actual student learning and development rather than simply increasing resources or funding.

The role of private institutions: complementing government efforts

In the context of India's education system, the private sector encompasses a diverse range of entities, including non-profit organizations running direct

programs with children/teachers, foundations that typically support interventions run by nonprofits, multilateral organizations such as UNICEF that support government institutions in improving various thematic areas, universities, and private companies providing educational services. Over the last few years, there is an increasing push to privatize education to improve quality. The scale of India's education system is such that it is often argued that private institutions should support and enhance government efforts, not supplant them (Kingdon, 2020).

Private entities can play a crucial role by focusing on reducing the administrative burden on teachers and helping improve teaching quality. For example, organizations like Rocket Learning have developed innovative tools such as WhatsApp-based chatbots that help parents teach foundational literacy and numeracy at home. Or, institutions like the Central Square Foundation work closely with state governments to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by developing contextually relevant materials in partnership with various state government bodies and building systems capacity to deliver effectively. These kinds of targeted interventions address specific pain points in the system without trying to replace government infrastructure.

Similarly, foundations like the Gates Foundation have invested in programs that improve teacher training and classroom instruction (Gates Foundation, 2022). By focusing on enhancing quality rather than just providing infrastructure, these initiatives address core issues in the learning process. However, this is often

not the approach taken by several private players, especially CSR initiatives, in improving school education. A significant amount of private funding is directed toward building infrastructure, such as toilets and classrooms, with the hope that it will lead to better learning outcomes. Substantial evidence suggests that investments in infrastructure have the least correlation with learning outcomes.

Nonprofits can also serve as models or hubs of excellence for government institutions to learn from. For instance, Christel House India, a small network of high-quality no-fee schools, exemplifies an institution that produces exceptional outcomes while serving children from the same socio-economic backgrounds as those attending government schools. This presents a valuable opportunity to codify and share effective practices from such models for government schools to adopt. Ultimately, it is crucial for private players to invest in initiatives that enhance the quality of learning in government schools.

Creating synergy: public-private partnerships

In the landscape of non-state actor interventions in India's education system, there are broadly two to three types of partnerships that have emerged. The first category includes organizations that directly work within the government machinery by deploying their own resources – such as Teach for India – which focuses on placing Fellows in classrooms to improve learning outcomes. The second type involves organizations that aim to strengthen system capacity by working with teachers and school leaders through structured training and development programs, as seen with Alokkit and SEF. A third category comprises organizations like Samagra and Central Square Foundation (CSF), which focus on building salience for specific issues, advocating for reforms, and working in partnership with the government to enable systems-level capacity to deliver outcomes. There is no single silver bullet when it comes to which approach works best, but for interventions to be sustainable at scale, the long-term goal must be for the public education system to deliver independently, with minimal direct support from non-state actors.

Another key aspect of making India's education system work efficiently lies in creating effective synergies between government efforts and private sector innovations. This requires careful alignment of goals and clear delineation of roles (Srivastava, 2010). Most interventions led by private non-state actors in government schools follow a piecemeal approach to addressing the issue of quality. There are





very few interventions that take a holistic approach or are designed with active collaboration between government and private institutions. The reality is that what works for a nonprofit in 10 schools won't necessarily work in 1,000 schools due to the dilution that occurs when scaling any program. Therefore, the challenge lies in the execution of these interventions and how thoughtfully they are designed to address the root of the problem.

Public-private partnerships should be structured around clearly defined, measurable outcomes tied to improvements in the education system's efficiency and effectiveness. Innovations from private non-state actors should be designed with scalability in mind, ensuring that successful interventions can be integrated into the larger government system.

At the same time, it's crucial that private sector involvement doesn't lead to the creation of parallel structures that might undermine the public education system. Instead, the focus should be on building the capacity of the existing system, whether through teacher training, curriculum development, or enhancing assessment methodologies (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2015).

Measuring success: beyond enrollment numbers

To make our government education system more efficient and effectively integrate the private non-state actors' contributions, we need to set clear and meaningful success metrics. Instead of just focusing on enrollment numbers or the state of infrastructure, we should look at how well the system performs overall and its long-term impact. Real educational improvements often take years, if not decades, to show results.

It is also critical that we actively focus on enhancing the system's capacity to deliver high-quality inputs consistently. While it's important to design interventions that lead to sustained improvements in learning outcomes, we must also address the day-to-day operational challenges that schools face. Often, the issues stem from multiple, intertwined factors at various levels of implementation – from administrative bottlenecks to resource allocation inefficiencies. To truly drive change, solutions must be contextually relevant, taking into account the unique challenges of different regions and communities. This approach ensures that both immediate and long-term goals are met, enabling the education system to function more effectively over time.



The path forward

Making India's vast education system work efficiently is a massive task that requires the concerted efforts of both government and private institutions. The government must lead the charge, shifting from a focus on inputs (like enrollment and infrastructure) to an emphasis on outcomes and system efficiency. Private entities, in turn, must align their efforts with government priorities, bringing innovation and efficiency to specific areas of need.

By embracing data-driven governance, fostering meaningful public-private partnerships, and maintaining a relentless focus on long-term system efficiency, we can begin to transform India's education machinery. This transformation is not just about improving statistics; it's about creating a system that can effectively equip 264 million children with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century.

The path forward requires patience, persistence, and a willingness to learn and adapt. With a clear vision, strategic collaboration, and unwavering commitment, we can ensure that India's education system becomes a powerful engine of progress, propelling the nation towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

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The primitive world of plants and fungi

Nandini Dholepat

As a botanist, I often find myself answering questions from curious friends about plant life. And because I have a group of friends with common interests, we created a WhatsApp group called "Backyard Discovery" to share and answer questions about plants that we find in our neighbourhood.



Photos: Nandini Dholepat

Over the initial few days after setting up the group, there were many questions that members had. As it would have been difficult to answer these questions via WhatsApp, I suggested that we meet on the following Saturday by the stream in our neighbourhood to find the answers.

On Saturday afternoon, the children – Shilpa, Rini, Anand, and Vivan – were the first ones to arrive. They asked to see pictures of my recent trip to the US. I opened the photos folder on my computer as we waited for Madhavi and Sujatha to arrive. Shilpa was excited when she saw pine trees with big cones. She told her friends about her trip to Ooty. There she had seen pine trees and collected different types of cones, which she had painted to make flower vases.

"Are these cones flowers?" Rini asked.

"Pine trees belong to the 'Gymnosperm' group. They are called 'naked seed plants'. The cones are modified leaves that hold seeds," I replied.



"Funny, because they look like carved wood, without colour petals," Rini said.

I showed them another photo, "See this photo, when I dusted the pine cone, seeds fell down from it."

"This is interesting, not like mango or guava, where the seeds are inside the fruit," Anand said.

After an hour, Madhavi and Sujatha arrived. Together, we walked towards the stream. This time we noticed big mushrooms in between the grass.

Vivan said, "Aunty, we can see both the stem and umbrella of this mushroom. You said something about hyphae in mushrooms. How can we see that?"

"You can see the hyphae only under a microscope as they are very minute filaments," I replied.

Sujatha suddenly asked, "When will we go to the university? Have you asked your friend?"



"Yes, maybe next week. Once I hear from her, I will let you know. In the meanwhile, all of you note down your observations and questions that you want to ask the professors and scholars there," I said.

What is that big ball-like thing over there?" Vivan bent and pointed towards a bush.

"Oh! A white balloon! Or is it a ball?" Rini wondered.

I turned to see where Vivan had pointed, "You all wait here, I will check."

I pushed the stems of the bush and pulled the ball out.

"This is a puff ball mushroom. It is also a kind of fungi," I said.

"But this is just like a ball. Where are the stem and the gills?" Vivan asked.

"These belong to a separate group. Spores are produced in the centre of the ball. When the puff ball matures, it develops an aperture to release the spores."

"This is yet to mature and hence has not yet produced spores," I split the puff ball open to show them.

"Can I touch it?" Vivan asked.

"Sure, you can," I replied.

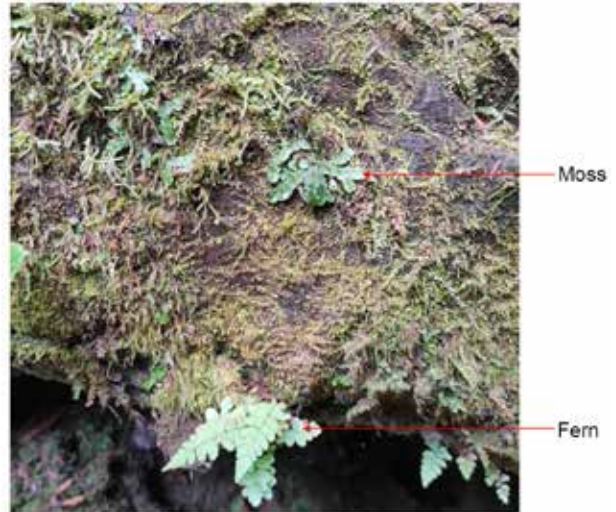
"This is the first time I am seeing something like this!" said Madhavi.

"This is also used for cooking?" Sujatha asked.

"Some varieties are consumed. But I am not sure about this one," I replied.



When we reached the stream, it was marshy and cool. "See these small plants on the rocks. They cover the rock like a green mat," Sujatha said.



"You can see a lot of moss plants here. Underneath the rocks, you can also see some ferns growing," I pointed.

"I know ferns. We have fern plants in our school garden," Vivan said.

"Do they grow big and produce flowers?" Rini asked.

"These are all non-flowering plants. Algae and moss are primitive plants. Moss generally grows like a thick mat. You have seen moss sticks, which are used as a support to grow plants in pots," I replied.

I picked some moss and turned it upside down.

"These are also called 'liverworts' as they look like the liver! The plant body is called 'thallus'. It is a flat green structure that helps in photosynthesis. The underside of the thallus has thread-like growth called 'rhizoids', which help in the absorption of water and minerals, and to hold the substratum."

"Come here, look. This is another kind of moss. You can see the moss growing on this tree trunk. The small green capsule-like structures hanging on the



stalks are 'sporophyte'. They produce spores. These spores fall down and produce 'gametophytes' or 'prothallus', which in turn produce separate male and female gametes. In nature, male and female gametes unite to produce an embryo, which is like a seed. This seed germinates to produce the sporophyte," I showed them the mass growing on a tree trunk.

"So, there are two different forms of the same plant in nature, and the formation of gametophyte-sporophyte- gametophyte continues like a circle?" Madhavi asked.

"Yes, it is a cycle. It is called alternation of generation. There are two different forms of the same plant. In some types of moss, it is difficult to distinguish the sporophyte from the gametophyte, as the thallus looks the same to the naked eye. In ferns, generally, the gametophytes are very small, you cannot see them with your naked eye. You can learn in detail when we go to university," I said.

"Then what about fruits and seeds? How do these non-flowering plants multiply?" Rini asked.

I picked up a fern, "You can get new plants by separating the stems with roots. On the underside of the fern leaves, you can see small structures, along the margin. These are sporangium, which produce the male and female gametes," I turned the fern leaf to show orange colour outgrowths on the leaves.

Anand and Vivan were looking at the tadpoles swimming in the water. "What are these green plants inside the water aunty?" Anand asked.

"They look like algae. You must have seen these kinds of plants in aquariums too," I replied.

"Oh yes, I have seen them!" said Vivan.

"Do they also produce spores?" Anand asked.

"Yes, they also produce spores," I replied.

"One more query Nandini, can we take these samples to observe in the lab?" Madhavi asked.

"If you collect water here, you can see many different microscopic organisms too. But these algae are very fragile. It is better to collect the sample before going to the lab," I replied.

"This is amazing. If I had come here alone, I would not have noticed all this. I will come once again to collect the samples before going to the university," Sujatha said.

Suggested activities

1. Find different types of ferns in your neighbourhood and draw their pictures.
2. Make a list of the different types of non-flowering plants you have seen.

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The delicate dance

Navigating the teacher-student relationship

Anuradha C

In the intricate world of education, the relationship between teachers and students is a delicate dance that requires finesse, empathy, and a keen understanding of human dynamics. At its core, this relationship is about striking a balance between authority and approachability, between setting high standards and offering unwavering support. It's a tightrope walk that even the most experienced educators find challenging, yet it's crucial for creating an environment where learning flourishes and students thrive.

The classroom tango: leading with authority, following with flexibility

One of the most critical aspects of this relationship is finding the sweet spot between assertiveness and adaptability. A teacher must command respect and maintain order in the classroom, but not at the expense of creating a welcoming and engaging atmosphere. The best educators know how to set clear expectations and boundaries while still being approachable and responsive to their students' needs. They understand that each class, each student, and even each day might require a slightly different approach. This flexibility allows them to adjust their teaching style on the fly, read the room and respond to the ever-changing dynamics of a classroom full of young minds.

Anecdote #1: High school teacher at an all-girls convent in Bengaluru

"I accompany my students to Sunday brunches, movies, rock concerts! But if they are one minute late coming to my class the next day, I do not let them into my class."

The empathy equation: solving for x-tra support without crossing lines

Beyond the academic realm, truly exceptional teachers recognize their role in supporting students through personal crises. The classroom isn't an isolated bubble; students bring their whole selves to school, including their worries, fears, and personal struggles. A sensitive and empathetic teacher can be a lifeline for a student navigating difficult times.

However, this support must be carefully balanced with maintaining professional boundaries. The goal isn't to become a student's therapist or best friend, but rather to create a safe space where they feel heard and understood, and to guide them towards appropriate resources when needed.

This level of empathy and support can make a world of difference in a student's life. It might mean noticing when a usually enthusiastic student becomes withdrawn and taking the time to check in. It could involve creating a moment of calm and understanding for a student who's struggling with anxiety. Or it might simply be about fostering a classroom environment where students feel safe to express themselves and their concerns.

Anecdote #2: Retired class teacher from a government high school in Vellore

"Decades ago, one of my students attained puberty while in class and she was bewildered by what was happening. Her parents were migrant labourers and not in town. I took care of her for the next 3-4 days and helped her tide over that life altering phase in a young girl's life. She is over 30 years old now, and a thriving lawyer. She still routinely comes to visit me with her kids."

The learning spectrum symphony: conducting a classroom of diverse talents

Another crucial aspect of the teacher-student relationship is the ability to provide personalized attention to students with diverse learning needs. In any classroom, you'll find a spectrum of abilities and learning styles. Some students grasp concepts quickly and crave additional challenges, while others may struggle with basic principles and require extra support. A skilled teacher learns to navigate these differences, finding ways to nurture the potential of gifted students without leaving others behind.

This might involve implementing differentiated instruction techniques, where lessons are tailored to meet various learning styles and abilities. It could mean providing additional resources or



challenges for students who are racing ahead, while offering extra support and alternative explanations for those who are struggling. Regular assessments and feedback loops help teachers track individual progress and adjust their approach accordingly.

The key is to create an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported in their learning journey. This personalized approach not only helps students academically but also boosts their confidence and engagement with the material.

Anecdote #3: Adi, the special needs kid and his favourite Geography Miss!

"Adi was routinely chastised in class for poor attention, not completing homework, and bad performance in exams. He was branded a poor student, a spoilt child. But one day, I noticed he got the capitals of all countries right, even the obscure ones. Then I decided to investigate closer and noticed he would struggle with simple reading, writing, and cognition. I alerted his parents of the possibility of him being autistic. He is very attached to me. He never cuts his birthday cake until I get there!"

Ultimately, the art of managing the teacher-student relationship comes down to a delicate balance of professionalism, empathy, and adaptability. It's about creating a classroom environment where high

standards are set and supported, where students feel safe to take intellectual risks, and where the joy of learning is palpable.

The most effective teachers are those who can navigate this complex dance with grace and intention. They understand that their role extends beyond merely imparting knowledge; they are mentors, guides, and sometimes even a source of stability in a student's turbulent world. By mastering the nuances of this relationship, teachers can create transformative educational experiences that students will carry with them long after they've left the classroom.

In the end, the teacher-student relationship is at the heart of education. When nurtured properly, it can ignite a lifelong love of learning, build confidence, and help students discover their unique potential. It's a responsibility that comes with great challenges, but also with the opportunity to make a profound and lasting impact on young lives.

The author is an IT industry drop-out after several years of slogging and money-making. She is now working freelance as a corporate technical trainer and content writer. She is hoping to channelize her passion for writing into a satisfying experience for herself and a joyous experience for her readers. She can be reached at [<anuradhac@gmail.com>](mailto:anuradhac@gmail.com).

Balancing compassion and consequences

Neerja Singh

What is that one value all humans everywhere strive to strike? A balance. It is a universally accepted attribute of a wholesome life.

However, the cultural headwinds today are weakening adult leadership that can help the young achieve a healthy balance in their lives. Bosses, teachers, coaches, and parents tread on egg shells around children today because the popular script is that "our young are under too much pressure and we cannot afford to stress them out further." We are all in the midst of a massive cultural push to extend compassion and empathy to our over-stimulated young.

Adults often fear drawing boundaries with their children and wards due to a variety of emotional, psychological, and societal factors. One of the primary reasons is the fear of damaging the parent-child relationship. Many parents worry that setting firm boundaries might lead to conflict, resentment, or a breakdown in communication. This fear is often compounded by guilt, especially if the parents feel they are not spending enough time with their children due to work or other obligations. They may compensate by being overly lenient, hoping to maintain their child's affection and avoid feelings of inadequacy.

Another reason adults hesitate to set boundaries is the desire to be seen as a "cool" or "understanding" parent. In a world where social media and peer pressure influence parenting styles, there is a temptation to be more of a friend than a parent. This approach may stem from the fear of being labelled as strict or old-fashioned, leading to a reluctance to enforce rules and expectations.

In that process, we have lost sight of the interplay between compassion and consequences. This is a theme that will resonate deeply with every adult

who is remotely concerned with the growth of young people. The fact is that for the truest success in life, our next generation will need to experience both.

Let me share a story from my teenage years that captures this balance. Growing up in India, I was witness to my brother being surrounded by friends, who, like him, were brimming with youthful energy and reckless ideas. I vividly remember the day he turned 17 and got his chocolate-coloured Hero Majestic Moped. I was as ecstatic as his friends to hit the road on this new steed with him.

Illustration: Shilpy Lather



One afternoon, a friend had the idea that we should try something daring. My brother would drive the moped with me as his pillion, and another would ride on a bicycle, holding on to the moped. It seemed thrilling, the kind of excitement only a teenager would crave. So, there we were, his friend touched the moped with one toe, balancing on the bike with the other, as we accelerated down the road.

Everything seemed fun until, out of nowhere, we were caught by my friend's father, who happened to be driving behind us. He saw everything, and unlike what we expected, didn't immediately scold us. Instead, he chuckled, probably remembering his own youthful days, and let us off with a warning. But the story didn't end there.

Our father, on the other hand, wasn't amused when he heard what happened. When we got home, he sat us down and asked, "Did you think about what could have gone wrong?" At that moment, I realized

I hadn't. The fun had blinded me to the potential dangers. Our father didn't shout or lecture us endlessly.

Instead, he calmly explained the risks and then handed down a consequence: my brother was



grounded for two weeks, his driving privileges revoked.

It was a tough lesson, but it was fair. Our father's approach combined compassion with consequences, ensuring that we understood the gravity of our actions without feeling crushed by guilt. This balance taught us both to think before acting, a lesson that has stayed with us I would like to believe.

In India, where the value of respect for elders and authority is deeply ingrained, the lessons of compassion and consequences often go hand-in-hand. I recall another story that made headlines not long ago, involving a young student who was caught cheating during an exam. His mother, instead of covering up for him or pleading with the authorities, made him own up to his mistake. She walked him to the principal's office and insisted that he face the consequences of his actions. The boy was suspended for a week, but during that time, his mother didn't just punish him. She sat with him, helped him understand the importance of integrity, and worked through his studies together.

These stories, though different in context, highlight the same principle. Compassion doesn't mean letting someone off the hook; it means caring enough to ensure they understand the consequences of their actions. This is a lesson that echoes through the generations in India, where parents, teachers, and community leaders often walk the fine line between nurturing and disciplining.

Compassion without consequences can lead to a sense of entitlement, where young people might begin to believe that they can evade accountability. On the other hand, consequences without compassion can breed resentment. The real challenge lies in blending the two, creating an environment where young people feel supported even as they learn from their mistakes. Children, who grow up without clear boundaries, may struggle with self-discipline, respect for authority, and understanding the concept of limits. The lack of structure, moreover, can lead to difficulties in school, social relationships, and later in professional environments where rules and boundaries are essential for success.

Time and again, it has been seen that young people raised without boundaries often lack the ability to cope with frustration and disappointment. Without the experience of being told "no" or being held accountable for their actions, they may have unrealistic expectations of life and struggle with

resilience. This can result in emotional instability, poor decision-making, and an inability to handle the challenges of adulthood. In the long term, the absence of boundaries can lead to a lack of respect for others' rights and feelings. Without the early lessons that boundaries provide, individuals may become self-centred, disregarding the needs and limits of others in their personal and professional lives. This can lead to strained relationships, both personally and professionally, and hinder their ability to function effectively in society.

Ultimately, while setting boundaries may be challenging for adults, it is a crucial aspect of responsible parenting. Clear boundaries provide children with a sense of security, structure, and understanding of the world around them. They learn the importance of rules, respect, and self-control, which are essential for their development into well-adjusted, responsible, and empathetic adults.

In the end, it's about preparing them for the realities of life. Whether it's the judge who refused to lower the sentence for a hungry young man who resorted to theft or the mother who turned in her son after recognizing him in a security photo, the message is clear: true compassion involves guiding someone towards better choices, not shielding them from the repercussions of their actions.

So, as we navigate our roles as mentors, parents, and leaders, let's remember this balance. By standing firm in our principles while offering a hand to those who stumble, we can help shape a future generation that is both compassionate and responsible.

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Ways to

In today's interconnected and dynamic world, interpersonal skills are more essential than ever. These skills go beyond academic achievements and play a crucial role in a student's personal and professional growth. Interpersonal skills encompass the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate responsibly, and build meaningful relationships.

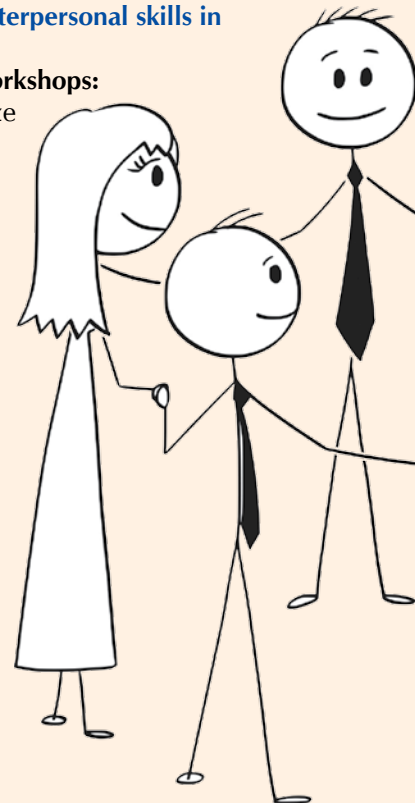
Why are interpersonal skills important?

Interpersonal skills, often referred to as soft skills, are not only important for building strong relationships, but also for excelling in various aspects of life. These skills enable students to express their thoughts clearly, listen actively, and understand diverse perspectives. They facilitate teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, which are fundamental in both academic and real-world settings.

Ways to develop interpersonal skills in students

Communication workshops:

Schools can organize workshops that focus on improving communication skills. Effective communication workshops can include activities such as public speaking, debates, and group discussions. These



build the skills that count

Anubha Rawat

activities encourage students to articulate their thoughts, actively listen to others, and respond thoughtfully.

Collaborative projects: Group projects allow students to cooperate and collaborate with peers. Through such projects, students allocate tasks, share ideas, and work towards a common goal.

Drama and role-play: Incorporating drama exercises and role-playing activities into the curriculum can enhance students' empathy and perspective-taking abilities. By stepping into different roles and scenarios, students develop a deeper understanding of various viewpoints, emotions, and sensibilities.

Conflict resolution: Schools should teach students techniques for resolving conflicts in a constructive manner. This could involve teaching them active

listening skills, empathy, and guiding them through real-life scenarios that require resolution.

Peer mentoring programs: Establishing mentorship programs where older students mentor younger ones can foster a sense of responsibility, empathy, and leadership in the mentors while providing younger students with a supportive environment.

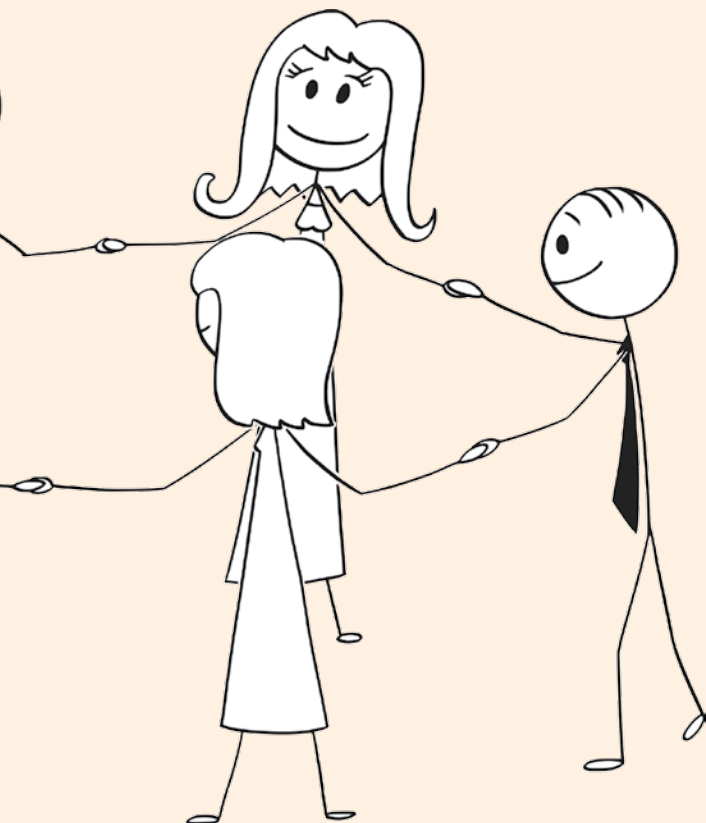
Cultural and diversity awareness: Schools can promote cultural sensitivity and diversity appreciation through activities, discussions, and celebrations of different traditions. This helps students learn to respect and interact effectively with people from various backgrounds.

Developing emotional intelligence: Incorporating emotional intelligence education into their curriculum, involves teaching students to recognize and manage their emotions as well as understand and empathize with the emotions of others.

Community engagement activities: Encourage students to participate in community service or outreach programs. Engaging with the community exposes students to different perspectives and allows them to apply their interpersonal skills in real-life situations.

Fostering interpersonal skills among students doesn't just benefit them during their academic years; it equips them with tools for success in adulthood. By nurturing effective communication, collaboration, and empathy, schools contribute to the development of well-rounded individuals who can navigate challenges, build strong relationships, and make positive contributions to society.

The author is an educator who is known for her engaging teaching style and loves creating vibrant, rich, and positive learning spaces for young minds to foster a deep love for the English language. She can be reached at [<aana1924@gmail.com>](mailto:aana1924@gmail.com).



Unravelling the tangled ball

Anne Isaac

In the world we inhabit, frames serve as the boundaries that shape our experiences. They hold our precious memories in place, like the photographs encased in glass. They support our vision, much like the frames that cradle our lenses. They define our spaces, as the sturdy frames of doors and windows that enclose our homes. They even shape the way we see the world, as our frames of mind determine how we perceive reality. And just as frames give structure to our photographs and our thoughts, they can also provide a framework for understanding complex educational concepts, helping us see how different ideas and disciplines fit together.

Think of them like the skeleton of a building. It's the glue that holds the building together. In school, frames can help children organize their thoughts and connect new ideas with old ones. It's like building a huge castle, brick by brick.

The concept of frames offers a promising solution. These cognitive structures, similar to architectural blueprints, provide a skeletal framework for organizing information. By understanding and effectively employing frames, educators can transform their classrooms into dynamic spaces where learning is not just acquired, but deeply comprehended.

This project of using frames for teaching, if planned well with all subject teachers of a class coming together, might take a month,

but can become a helpful pedagogical tool for both students and teachers over time. I have taken examples from across grades – the idea being that frames are cognitive organizers, conceptual scaffolds that provide a structured overview of a topic. In education, frames serve as blueprints for knowledge, helping students visualize, comprehend, and retain information.

Let's begin by creating a frame for a familiar concept: the novel.

- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Elements:** Plot, characters, setting, theme, conflict, resolution
- **Purpose:** Entertainment, education, character development
- **Structure:** Exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution

This simple frame demonstrates how a complex entity like a novel can be broken down into manageable components. By understanding these components, students can better analyze and appreciate literary works.

Let's make it simpler and think about a story.

Every story has a beginning, middle, and end, right? That's a frame! Let's break down a simple story: 'The big red dog chased the small white cat quickly up the tall tree. The cat meowed sadly. Soon, a little boy came along and rescued the cat!' See how each part has a job to do? That's like the bricks in our 'story house'.

of learning using frames

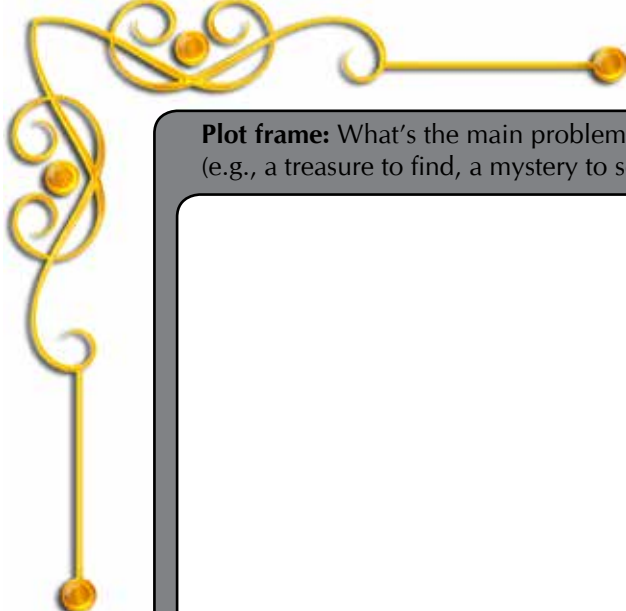
Activity time

Now, it's time for you to be the architect of your own story house! Here's a template to help you frame different types of stories,

Genre : (Choose your genre:
adventure, mystery, fantasy, etc.)

Setting frame: Where does your story take place?
(e.g., a haunted castle, a bustling city, a magical forest)

Character frame: Who are your main characters?
(e.g., a brave knight, a clever detective, a mischievous fairy)



Plot frame: What's the main problem or conflict?
(e.g., a treasure to find, a mystery to solve, a dragon to defeat)

Climax frame: What's the most exciting part? (e.g., the final battle, the big revelation, the magical transformation)

Resolution frame: How does your story end? (e.g., happily ever after, the mystery is solved, the world is saved)

Let's create a story together!

Choose your genre and fill in the frames to build your story:

- Spooky tale template: Frame it with a dark and stormy night, a creaky old house, and a mysterious character.
- Funny story template: Frame it with a silly situation, unexpected twists, and a laugh-out-loud ending.
- Adventure story template: Frame it with an exotic location, a daring quest, and a hero's triumph.

Inspecting our story houses

Just like real houses need inspections, our stories do too! As we inspect our story houses, check if you've used your grammar bricks correctly. And remember, building is a team effort! Let's help each other strengthen our stories, making sure each part fits perfectly into the overall frame.

Let's review our story:

- Foundation frame: Does your story have a strong beginning that sets the stage?
- Structure frame: Does the plot build up to an exciting climax?
- Roof frame: Does the story have a satisfying ending that ties everything together?

Remember, our frames are like blueprints, guiding us as we build our written creations. By guiding students through these steps, they not only create their own stories but also understand how the components work together to form a cohesive narrative.

Frames excel at simplifying complex ideas.

Frames are not static structures; they evolve as our understanding deepens. To tackle complex topics, we need to construct more elaborate frames.

Let's look at an example in science.

Frame 1: The food chain framework

- **Data provided:** Information about producers, consumers, and decomposers.
- **What needs to be found out:** How energy flows through a simple food chain.

Activity:

1. **Identify** the roles of producers (e.g., plants), primary consumers (e.g., herbivores), secondary consumers (e.g., carnivores), and decomposers.
2. **Explain** how energy is transferred from one level to the next.
3. **Create** a visual representation of a food chain.
4. **Discuss** the importance of each level in maintaining balance in the ecosystem.

Frame 2: The food web framework

- **Data provided:** Multiple interconnected food chains within an ecosystem.
- **What needs to be found out:** How species within an ecosystem are interdependent.

Activity:

1. **Illustrate** how different food chains in an ecosystem interconnect to form a food web.
2. **Analyze** the impact of removing one species from the food web.
3. **Discuss** the concept of interdependence among species.
4. **Create** a visual representation of a food web and highlight key interconnections.

Frame 3: The energy flow framework

- **Data provided:** Information on energy transfer, energy pyramids, and energy loss.
- **What needs to be found out:** How energy flows through different levels of an ecosystem.

Activity:

1. **Explain** the concept of energy transfer from producers to various levels of consumers.
2. **Illustrate** the structure of an energy pyramid, showing how energy diminishes at each level.
3. **Discuss** the reasons for energy loss as it moves up the pyramid.
4. **Visualize** the flow of energy through an entire ecosystem.

Frame 4: The human impact framework

- **Data provided:** Examples of human activities affecting ecosystems, such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change.
- **What needs to be found out:** How human activities influence ecosystems and what can be done to mitigate negative impacts.

Activity:

1. **Identify** human activities that negatively impact ecosystems.
2. **Explore** specific case studies illustrating the effects of these activities.
3. **Analyze** the long-term consequences of human actions on ecosystems.
4. **Brainstorm** and propose solutions for mitigating human impact and protecting ecosystems.

Interconnectedness through frames

Once you have created frames for different subjects, explore how they overlap. A historical event can be analyzed through the lens of science, geography, economics, and politics. A scientific experiment can be linked to mathematical calculations and language-based data analysis. Such cross-disciplinary approaches not only deepen student understanding, but also prepare them for real-world problem-solving.

Let's dive into a comprehensive example interconnecting geography, economics, and political science.

The Green Revolution: a story of India's farms

Imagine India before the Green Revolution. Farms were small, tools were simple, and hunger was a constant worry. But then came a big change. Farmers started using new seeds that grew faster and taller, and they learned to water their fields better. It was like magic! Crops grew bigger, and there was more food for everyone.

But this magic trick wasn't the same everywhere. Some places had lots of water, while others were dry. Some farmers had big lands, while others had tiny plots. And the government played a big role too, deciding who got what and how much.

Let's break it down:

The Green Revolution: a story of India's farms – framed

Imagine India's farms as a puzzle. Each piece represents a different aspect of the Green Revolution.

Now, let's tell the story using these frames:



Frame 1 – Science: Plant breeders developed high-yielding crop varieties resistant to pests and diseases.

Activity:

Soil testing: Have students test different types of soil to understand the importance of nutrient-rich soil for crop growth.

Field trip: Visit a local farm to observe agricultural practices and learn about the challenges faced by farmers.



Frame 2 – Geography: Some places are flat with lots of rain, while others are hilly and dry.

Activity:

Map analysis: Analyze maps of India to identify regions with different climatic and geographical conditions.



Frame 3 – Economics: New seeds and better ways to farm cost money. Some farmers had money to try new things, while others couldn't afford it.

Activity:

Market analysis: Analyze the market for agricultural products to understand factors affecting prices.



Frame 4 – Political science: The government helped by giving farmers money and advice. They built canals to bring water to the fields and made new roads to get crops to the cities.

Activity:

Case study: Analyze a government initiative to promote agricultural modernization.

Policy analysis: Have students evaluate the effectiveness of specific agricultural policies.

Putting it all together

The Green Revolution was about more than just bigger farms. It changed how people lived and worked. It made some people rich, while others struggled. It helped feed more people, but also changed the land. Understanding all these parts helps us see the whole picture.

So, the next time you eat a full meal, remember the farmers who worked hard to put food on your plate. And remember, the story of their success is also a story of challenges and choices.

Teachers can continue the narrative, incorporating the frames as they go forward.

- **Because of India's diverse geography (Frame 2),** farmers in different parts of the country faced unique challenges and opportunities. While those in the fertile plains benefited greatly from the new seeds, farmers in hilly regions struggled with limited water resources.
- **The economics of farming changed dramatically (Frame 3).** While some farmers became more prosperous, others were caught in a cycle of debt due to the high costs of new technologies.

Student-led frames: a framework for learning

By creating their own frameworks, students become active participants in the learning process. Instead of passively receiving information, students actively construct their knowledge through exploration, inquiry, and critical thinking. This approach fosters a sense of ownership, engagement, and deeper understanding of the material.

Activity: Student-led frame creation

Assign students a complex topic, such as climate change. In groups, they will develop frames that outline causes, effects, potential solutions, and personal actions.

To guide their work and enhance peer interaction, provide a template with cue questions like:

- *What are the key causes of this issue?*
- *How do these causes interconnect?*
- *What are the immediate and long-term effects?*
- *What solutions have been proposed or implemented?*
- *How can individuals contribute to addressing this issue?*

This collaborative activity not only promotes content mastery and problem-solving skills but also fosters meaningful peer feedback as students discuss and refine their frames together.

Activity: Frame reflection

Dedicate time for students to reflect on the effectiveness of the frames they've created. Use a structured template with cue questions to facilitate this reflection:

- *What worked well in your frame?*
- *Were there any gaps or areas that need improvement?*
- *How did peer feedback help you improve your frame?*

Encourage students to share their frames with peers and provide constructive feedback. This meta-cognitive process, combined with peer interaction, strengthens their frame-building skills and enhances their understanding of the content.

Consistent use of frames is essential for maximizing their impact. Embed frame creation and analysis into your regular teaching routine.

Conclusion

Frames are not merely organizational tools; they are catalysts for deeper learning. By providing structure, promoting critical thinking, and fostering student engagement, frames can transform your classroom into a dynamic learning environment. Remember, the most effective frames are those that are co-constructed by teachers and students. Embrace the flexibility and adaptability of frames to create tailored learning experiences for your students.

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How many different
of **FRAMES** do you s



kinds
spot?



Designed & illustration: Shruti Prabhu

Teaching, learning, journey through

V Arun



The setting is the academic meeting of the senior school. We are discussing some point and a young chemistry teacher walks in from her 10th standard class fuming. She says, "The students simply don't know the periodic table. I wonder who taught them chemistry in class 9?" My stomach does a somersault. It was me. I was their chemistry teacher the previous year. After my initial feelings of guilt, I was a bit astonished. Only last year I had come across the book *The Periodic kingdom* by Peter Atkins and remember being excited by it. I remember carrying this excitement to class and engaging with the periodic table for nearly three weeks, much longer than the time scheduled for the chapter. I remember my classes going very well through this chapter. I shared this piece of information in the meeting. Just then, the class 8 teacher piped up and said that he had spent a whole month on the periodic table, and the class 7 teacher said she had spent a whole term on the periodic table. You get the trend, right? Just then the principal of the school said, "Well, well... looks like the students have been taught the periodic table for many years now, but they haven't learnt it. That's clear, isn't it?"

That was one of those "aha" moments in my life as a teacher. I was left wondering what had happened in all these years of teaching that hadn't enabled learning for the students. Mind you, these were passionate teachers and they would have done a good job of teaching, and yet learning hadn't happened. Of course, one doesn't need to take the word of the young chemistry teacher literally. It is quite likely that with a bit of prodding

Photos courtesy: V Arun

and my own these areas

and jogging of memory, many in the class would have recollected, if nothing else, at least the basic concepts of the periodic table. But leaving that aside, to return to the question of teaching versus learning, there seems to be much to ponder here for a teacher.

Firstly, the idea that when something is taught well, it doesn't necessarily translate to being learnt well. It could of course happen, but it is not guaranteed. What facilitates learning? When does learning actually happen? This is the bread and butter of a teacher's life, but can we ever say that we have cracked it?

Early in my life as a teacher, I was amused and intrigued by Mark Twain's quip, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." This was quite true in my case. I went to over 10 schools and graduated in mechanical engineering, but my learning didn't have to do with books and concepts. I learnt enough to pass exams, but my real learning

was life learning. I shifted from English medium to Tamizh medium and back. I transitioned from city, to town, to village, and back. I went to government schools, private schools, panchayat schools and rubbed shoulders with children from different backgrounds and economic classes. I learnt from them about poverty, hardships, resilience in the face of adversity, and many other things. These were rich learning experiences. In short, I had a poor academic learning experience, but I won't trade the life experiences gained for anything else. These experiences shaped me as a person and helped me decide my life's journey.

Once my formal education ended and I was free to pursue my own learning paths, I have traversed a wonderful learning journey. At the moment, I am in my third decade of learning. Learning new things is the most exciting aspect of life. This excitement has an infectious quality and rubs off on people in one's sphere of influence.

What hampered learning during my schooling? Was it the artificial setting of the school system? Was it the endless torrent of information thrown my way, hour after hour, day after day? The pressure to perform, and score, and please the parents and teachers? Was it the exam system, which, in the most skewed of methods, assessed and certified one's learning with an air of finality? Exam results don't have anything nebulous about them. Conversely, they are very finite, they declare to the world the kind of learner one is and puts one in an ability class. The unfortunate thing is that these labels stick, even going





to the extent of one's self-assessment. Was it the artificiality of the classroom setting, separated from life itself? Was it the curriculum, which often seemed devoid of meaning? Was it the repetitive nature of the learning? Was it because the cart was put before the horse and answers were provided to questions that hadn't even risen in pupils' minds? Was it the charged and stressed atmosphere prevailing in the classrooms and schools in general? Was it because all spontaneity was stifled by the rigidity of the system? Was it all of this and more?

With my savviness or lack of true courage, whichever way you look at it, I coasted through the system and came out as above average. I am glad that when I look back, I see that I didn't buy into the system and came out on the top. On the other hand, it doesn't provide me much comfort that I had positioned myself as a mini-rebel and remained in the back benches. Looking back today, I feel that if I really had the courage and the support of my parents, I could at least have walked out of my engineering, which was a colossal waste of four years, which in turn led to six more wasted years working as an engineer. But the truth is, somewhere along the way, my self-worth crumbled and I got caught in a battle to prove myself. I do blame the parenting I had and the system for this, but I was complicit in letting this happen. So the dark years of struggle took me past high school and college and landed me a job, where I had to prove, to myself and the world, that I could survive as an engineer. Once I gained the confidence that I could and silenced my inner demons, I quit engineering and started teaching.

As a student, I must say, I had the good fortune of being engaged by passionate teachers, particularly during my government school days. Whether it facilitated learning in me or not, I was inspired by the

passion of these people. Even during the engineering degree that I loathe, I had the good fortune of having met a few passionate teachers. I feel when a teacher is passionate, you love them and in the process end up loving the subject.

My turning to teaching signalled the return of self-worth and the journey of learning resumed. Taking my own example, the greatest obstacle to learning was my trust in myself. I suspect this is true for many a student. Do other teachers agree?

What has facilitated learning once my formal education was over? I think it is the excitement of new knowledge, the passion to learn, and joy in the process of learning. I must say that I have not pursued all possible learning paths. While I may engage in the pursuit of some random topic, I have stayed with three major areas. One is in the realm of ecology. This includes botany and zoology. The second is in the realm of geography. The third area is history.

My learning primarily has taken three forms. One is the intellectual learning through books. The second is experiential. This has often been aided by the presence of a teacher. For instance, my learning about trees began through tree-walks in Bombay with a tree guru. The third way of learning has been rather intuitive. I started playing different sports when I was 20. My learnings from sports have been totally intuitive. Learning by doing. I have enjoyed all three forms of learning, and I feel there should be equal emphasis on all these aspects. The other effective tactic is to work on a project model. The last two years have been spent learning about the trees of Western Ghats. Prior to this, it was learning about the shrubs of the Eastern Ghats. My learning on these different paths have been insightful to me as



a teacher. To know that there is so much learning out there makes life wonderful and joyous.

To share a bit more about intuitive learning, I enjoy table tennis, tennis, swimming, and badminton. The purely physical learning and its constant unfolding is an exhilarating experience with new learnings and opportunities opening up each day. Here, it's not just my learning. It's teaching others and watching their learning curves as well. The learnings in these areas are so nuanced and subtle. The way one holds a racquet, the way a leg is positioned, the mind-body co-ordination. There is much artistry here.

Early on in my life as a teacher, I came across Howard Gardner and his Multiple Intelligence theory. It was very revelatory for me as a teacher and a learner to recognize that there are so many different ways in which intelligence comes forth. In my case, while I was always good at pattern recognition which has helped me in my nature learning, I never recognized this as a form of intelligence. Same with spatial orientation, the ability to understand and connect easily with people and so on. This may not have changed anything, but to be able to recognize the areas one is good at, definitely helps with one's perception of oneself. As a teacher too, I find so much confidence comes to students when they are recognized for things that are seemingly not in the conventional realms of learning, like craft, sports, empathy, nature, fine motor skills, etc.

Gleaning from my journey as a learner and bringing the learning to my life as a teacher, I feel the students, to have an effective learning journey, need a lot of freedom to choose their learning paths and a rich mix of different learning pathways. The learning journey should provide for self explorations, which

enable their own direct learning experience and not be all second-hand.

As a geography teacher, I have tried to bring this by helping students learn about the phases of the moon, the tides, the seasons, rainfall, etc., which can be learnt through direct experience and later be consolidated by textual knowledge.

But as my friend and fellow educator, Stefi Barna brought to my notice, students can be contributors to knowledge too and not just consumers of knowledge generated by others. This happens a lot nowadays through online nature platforms like iNaturalist and eBird. Through these platforms, children also record seasonal changes in trees and shrubs, migration of birds and butterflies based on their own observations.

When it comes to observational learning, I have noticed that some learn by drawing out the details, some by taking notes, some use photographs and some have photographic memories. Here, the most important aspect seems to be to have an open mind, uncluttered by ideas. I am saying this because I have noticed that students who are good text-based learners with strong conceptual learning aren't able to learn through simple direct observations.

I am now in my 28th year as a teacher and I feel that my teaching and learning curves are still very much on an upward rise and the years ahead are exciting with untold possibilities.

The writer has been a teacher for over 27 years. He taught in the J.Krishnamurti school in Chennai for 12 years and then moved to Tiruvannamalai to start Marudam farm school in 2009, with a group of friends. He is also into sea turtle conservation and ecological restoration in Chennai and Tiruvannamalai respectively. He can be reached at <arun.turtle@gmail.com>.

The why, where, and how of assessments

Meena Sriram

What are assessments? Are they meant only for the students or will they help teachers too? How often should they be conducted and in what forms? Let's find out.

Assessments are an important aspect of education. They are not merely exams or tests at the end of a session, unit, or class. Assessments must happen before, during, and after teaching. It can happen at multiple levels, situations, and forms.

The purpose of assessment could be many, but for now let us focus on the following two:

- To aid learning
- To improve teaching

To aid learning

- Motivating students.
- Giving students practice so they can see how well they are achieving the learning outcomes.
- To help students diagnose their strengths and their areas of improvement.
- Helping students plan their future careers.
- Helping students and others concerned with their learning track their progress.

To improve teaching

- Assessments can help review the effectiveness of teaching methodologies.
- They can hint at how students prefer learning.

How to assess

How we teach will also decide how we assess. Traditional instructional teaching methods cannot be supported by non-traditional assessment methods.

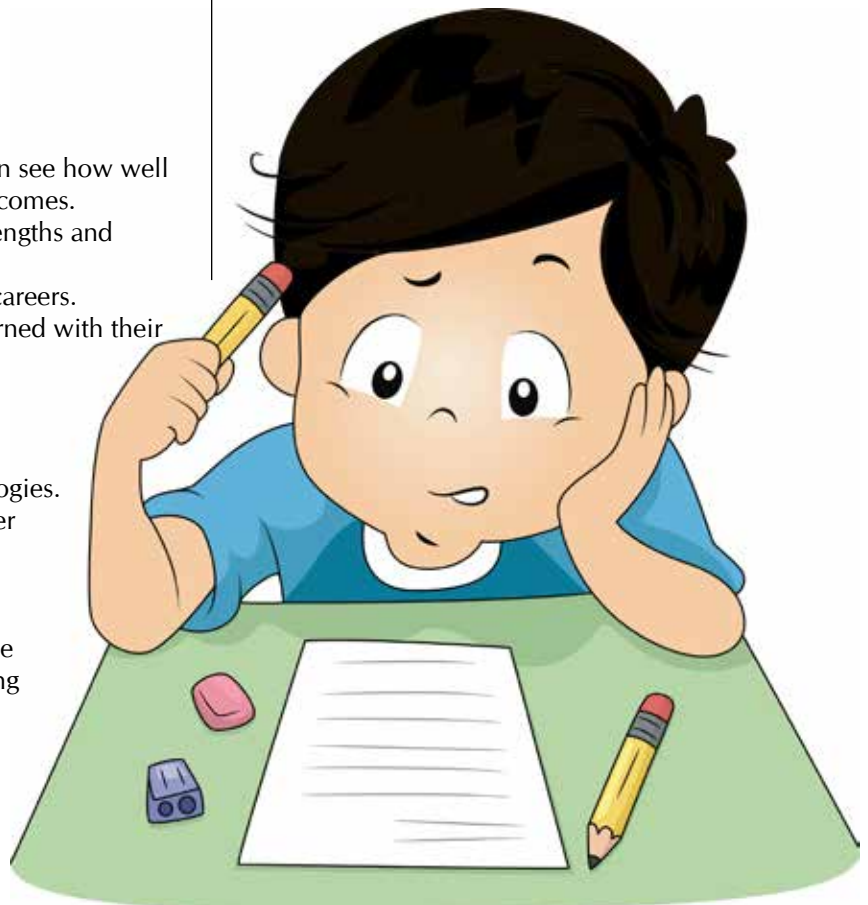
So, what are the traditional methods of assessment? Formative and summative assessments, which

are usually pen-paper tests. Formative assessments are done as the learning is happening, while a summative assessment indicates evaluation at the end of learning.

Alternative assessment methods

Many schools have started using technology and other tools for assessments, such as worksheets, activities, discussions, and observations.

But how much assessment is possible using these tools? All these non-traditional methods could assist



in both formative and summative assessment. It is left to the teacher to use them effectively to evaluate the level of student learning. While worksheets, activities, and discussions do not need an explanation, can one really assess children by merely observing them?

A lot of learning in our lives is through observation. Children learn many skills by simply observing the adults around them. While the child observes others and learns, the teacher must observe the child. Teachers should observe both the child's work (notebooks, projects, activities) and nature (behaviour, thought process).

But is not observation a time-consuming process? Observation is a skill that teachers can master with time. They can maintain journals with pages for every child. Teachers must set aside time for reflection at the end of each day and write notes about what they have done and seen in the classroom. Such practices will train their mind to observe and keep notes that enable in evaluating not merely the learning, but also the socio-emotional state of each child.

Utilizing assessment to personalize instruction and meet individual student needs

Most lesson plans have a small column for reflection. This must be put into practice to plan the assessment. Every teacher must have enough time to think about the session that was delivered and maintain notes of the same. This will help the teacher know which children were disruptive in class and who had genuine questions. Such observations could assist in creating the space for children to learn at their pace. The teacher could plan some extra time or scaffolding sessions so that the needs of all children are met.

In a non-traditional classroom, it is possible to plan individual student time. However, in a traditional classroom of about 40-50 students, the teacher could group children and observe their performances.

Engaging parents in the assessment process

Most schools believe in homework or assignments. This is a traditional tool for learning and testing understanding. In many homes, children are assisted or guided by parents in completing their assignments. In such cases, parents should be told how they can help their children. The school must have a clear idea as to when and how the parent must intervene.

Promoting student self-reflection

Children could be taught how to reflect on their own work. Teachers may create rubrics for self-evaluation, so that children can easily evaluate themselves and see where they stand. There is always scope for improvement and that must be clearly indicated to the children.

Children can maintain a tabulated sheet in which they give details of how much they have understood the concepts taught in class. I used to ask my students to keep a record of the classes they attended. They would write down the name of the concept and what they grasped and what was not clear. This made it easy for me, as a teacher, to reintroduce concepts or parts of concepts.

Applying assessment data to inform instructional decisions, interventions, and support systems for students

To rectify teaching methods or instructions, all assessment data must be utilized. This helps the teacher tailor instructions for children as per children's requirements.

It is essential to keep in mind the abilities of all the children, as they can be evaluated accordingly. A child who is competitive could be engaged in quizzes, while a child who is artistic could be asked to express their learning through art.

Finally, when planning assessments it is important to recall what the purpose of teaching is. Is it to simply give out grades, or is it to facilitate the learning of concepts? Assessments can then be curated accordingly! Teachers must remember that assessments can have negative effects too. If they are not administered in a fair manner, there can be scope for misunderstanding. Hence, the teacher must be very clear and convinced about the purpose of using a particular tool to assess. Normative assessments are easy to administer, while tailored ones require more effort.

However, time-consuming they may be, assessments are the teacher's best friend when it comes to aiding a child's learning. Therefore, when you plan your next assessment, take the time to put in a little effort.

The author is the academic administrator with Chinmaya Education Cell and has about 28 years of teaching experience. She can be reached at [<meenasriram@gmail.com>](mailto:meenasriram@gmail.com).

The power of inquiry-based learning in English education

Shalini Solanki

English education plays a vital role in nurturing students' language skills, critical thinking abilities*, and appreciation for literature. To enhance the effectiveness of teaching English, educators are turning to inquiry-based learning, an approach that empowers students to actively engage with the language and explore its nuances. In this article, we will delve into the benefits of inquiry-based learning in English education and provide practical examples of implementing it in the classroom.

Inquiry-based learning is an educational approach that places students at the center of their learning experience. It involves encouraging students to ask questions, investigate topics of interest, and seek answers through research, critical thinking, and collaboration. This student-centered approach fosters a deeper understanding of the English language by actively involving students in the learning process. Rather than passively receiving information, students become active seekers of knowledge. By questioning, investigating, and exploring, they develop a sense of ownership over their learning, which leads to higher engagement and retention of knowledge.

*English language gives students access to a range of ideas, books, and resources from different cultures. This helps them think more deeply about various topics. When students study English, they often analyze texts, write essays, and take part in debates, which pushes them to think carefully and build strong arguments. This process teaches them to question things, solve problems, and express ideas clearly.

Strategies for implementing inquiry-based learning

Reading activities

Reading is an integral part of English language education, and inquiry-based learning can breathe new life into this process. Instead of traditional comprehension questions, encourage students to generate their own questions about the text, discuss their interpretations, and conduct research to find answers. For example, in a lesson on figurative language, students can ask questions such as, "How does the use of similes and metaphors enhance the reader's understanding of a poem?", or "What effect does personification have on the overall meaning of a piece of prose?"

Students can research and present the historical and cultural context of a poem to enhance their understanding of its themes and imagery.

Project-based language tasks

Integrate project-based language tasks into the English curriculum to promote inquiry-based learning. For instance, ask students to create their own magazine articles, podcasts, or short films on a topic of their choice. This project-based approach encourages students to inquire, research, and apply their language skills in authentic and creative ways.

Debates and discussions

Engage students in debates and discussions. Assign controversial topics, or conduct literary analysis debates, or language-related discussions that require

Photos courtesy: Shalini Solanki





students to research, gather evidence, and articulate their arguments. This approach enhances critical thinking, communication skills, and the ability to express opinions effectively.

Authentic language tasks

Design language tasks that require students to apply their language skills in real-world contexts. This can include writing letters, creating advertisements, or conducting interviews. These tasks provide opportunities for students to inquire, research, and communicate effectively while developing their language proficiency.

For example, ask students to imagine that they are travel bloggers and to write about a specific destination. They must research the location, gather information, and write persuasive descriptions using descriptive language techniques.

Word etymology research

Assign students the task of researching the origin of a word. They can research the word's etymology, historical usage, and changing definitions. Students can explore the linguistic shifts and cultural influences that have affected the meaning of the word in written reports or visual presentations that highlight their research findings.

Case studies of language change

Ask students to look at particular instances of English language change. For instance, students can investigate the evolution of verb tenses (such as strong and weak verb conjugation), or the variations in pronoun usage (such as thou, ye, and you). Students can investigate the causes of these linguistic changes by reading articles and analyzing historical

sources. They can use written reports or multimedia presentations to present their findings.

Active exploration

Active exploration is essential for inquiry-based learning. Give students access to a variety of literary texts and materials, such as novels, short tales, and poetry, so that they can pick the pieces that catch their attention. Encourage them to study the historical and cultural circumstances in which the works were created as well as literary characteristics like narrative, characters, and symbolism.

For example, when studying George Bernard Shaw's *The Arms and The Man*, students may investigate the customs and expectations of society regarding war, love, and marriage. They might explore the themes of fate and free will and examine how these ideas are reflected in the play. Through active exploration, students develop a deeper understanding of the text and its relevance to their own lives.

These strategies can help educators to create an environment that fosters inquiry, critical thinking, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of English language and literature. Inquiry-based learning empowers students to become active participants in their own learning journey, preparing them for lifelong learning and success in the English language domain.

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Breaking through structures of power

Timira

I grew up in a typical patriarchal family in which the men 'provided', they made the important decisions, and they got the leg piece in the chicken curry. However, what always took me by surprise, even as a little girl, was my grandmother who orchestrated this patriarchal system. She laboured all day in the kitchen, had no wishes or dreams beyond those four walls, and was content as long as she ensured my mother's life was always a little unhappy.

I remember her grinding her teeth and muttering under her breath with great disappointment (possibly in herself) every time I served myself the chicken leg before she could serve it to my brother. As a child, I only did this to irk her and be amused by why this would be such a bother, but I get it today.

Power structures work exactly like this. Those who have been victims of oppression cannot perceive the structures that their oppressors have created. They do not perceive themselves as oppressed and their existential experience adopts an attitude of "adhesion" to their oppressor (Freire, 1970). My poor grandmother was a victim of this system.

Revolutionary Brazilian educational theorist, Paulo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* wrote extensively about this. Freire viewed society as a dynamic, ever-evolving system through which power is woven. That power, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, oppresses, creating social structures, institutions, ideas, and myths that sustain the wealth, way of life, and power of oppressors. All this comes at the expense of the oppressed. In the context of education, it comes at the expense of knowledge and the process of inquiry.

Power structures in education

Teachers have innate power in the classroom. The fact that they are an adult "in-charge" of a group of young people sets a default power dynamic in favour of the teacher, even if the teacher may not want it! In a teacher-centric system, the teacher 'teaches' and the student is 'taught', the teacher 'gives' while the students 'take'. There is an assumption that the teacher knows better, so they choose the content

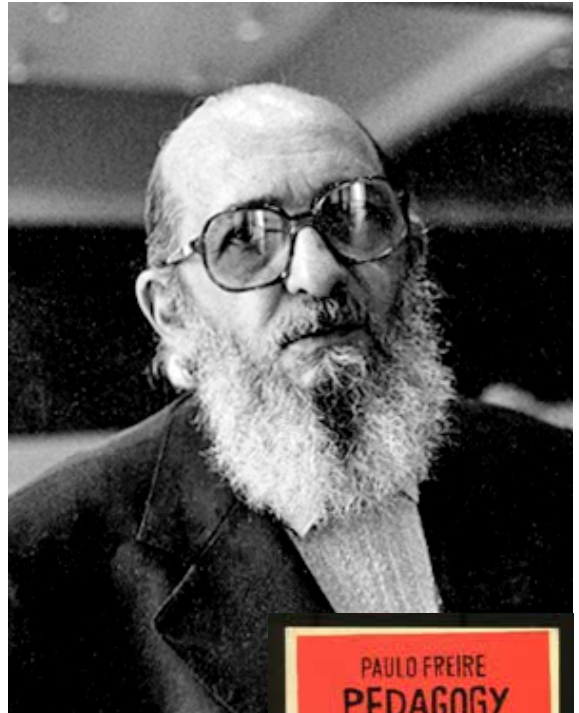
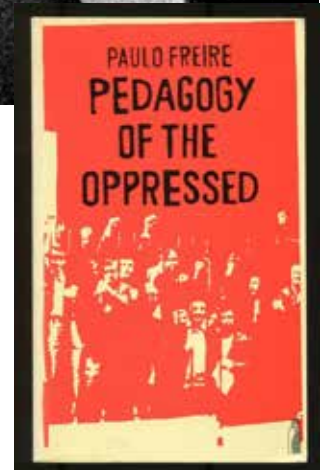


Photo: Slobodan Dimitrov
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to be taught, and they set all the standards, which the student must simply measure up to.

While it may seem that the teacher holds high degrees of power (which, no doubt, they do) we cannot ignore the reality that as part of this system the teacher, too, feels as trapped and stifled as the student because of the rigidity in the structure that they have to work within. In large private schools, teachers are literally handed out lesson plans that they must thoughtlessly execute, created by individuals sitting in corporate offices, who have little or no experience teaching in a classroom. While in the public sector, politicians and bureaucrats decide what should be taught and banned in the class.

Power structures are complex, layered, and political. While the teacher is an oppressor in one situation, they are victims of oppression in the larger system. In either situation, their autonomy is stripped away to a point that they can't even see the oppression they face or impose. Making teachers aware of this innate power dynamic in the educational system is imperative if we would like to shift from status quo towards social change.

Theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal, influenced by Freire's work, developed interactive and reflective theatre techniques in the 1970s, which he called the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), to encourage audiences to be active participants in order to explore, analyze, and transform the oppression they had accepted as a way of life.



As a trained TO facilitator and trainer, I use Boal's techniques in my workshops with teachers to better understand power. Teachers experience through the body and dynamic engagements, the imbalance of power between two bodies and the constant tension that it brews between them. It almost immediately brings perspective, and they are able to draw a parallel of how this plays out in the classroom and in the larger education system as well.

While changes in the larger system will always take more time and sustained effort, making shifts and breaking default patterns within our classrooms

is not beyond our means as teachers. Reclaiming our autonomy within our own spaces is a good place to begin. Through the body and through TO exercises, teachers identify where in our classrooms we see power and the various ways of breaking or neutralizing it.

Where does power exist?

In the body

Our body has its own language and as someone who is always being watched in a classroom, acute awareness of what the body is saying is a crucial element for a teacher to be mindful about. This is also why preschool teachers are always seen sitting on their knees when they talk to children one-on-one. A stiff chin or simply arms crossed in front of the chest can send shivers down a young spine, while a body leaning against a wall casually can bring immediate ease in a room.

The body carries power, but it also has its own intelligence. By consistently engaging with the body through theatre and the arts, we can hone that intelligence and use it actively and consciously not to oppress but to enable, by knowing when to neutralize its default power.

In space

Spaces hold power too. In an auditorium, the stage draws power while the audience seating does not. However, throw in some differently coloured chairs marked with 'reserved' tags in the first row and you suddenly see more power on those seats than the rest of them. This is why most conventional classrooms are arranged in ways where the teacher is always at the head of the class. You will see the dynamic completely change when a teacher, even for just a moment, sits in the seat of a student.

At a school where I recently worked on power dynamics, we decided to reposition the seating arrangement of the classrooms. The teachers realized that conventional rows and columns also had a power dynamic between first benchers and last benchers, so they rearranged it such that students were seated facing each other encouraging discussions and better listening. More importantly, by doing so, the teacher had space to move around the class breaking the default position of power that they held earlier. They realized that the teacher could draw power and attention to themselves whenever they required, from anywhere in the room. This was suddenly a choice and required awareness and objective to be employed. A tangible step towards reclaiming autonomy!



In knowledge

A teacher-centric classroom, where the assumption is that the teacher knows better, projects an absolute ignorance onto the others. This is a classic characteristic of the ideology of oppression, which negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry.

There is an evident power structure, where “the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students” (Friere, 1970). Here, there is no room to argue with the teacher, and definitely no tolerance for contradicting points of view.

The flipside to a teacher-centric classroom is a pedagogy based on an antithetical principle where students are more important than teachers a.k.a. the student-centric classroom! Here, the power lies in the hands of the students, where they are regarded as reservoirs of knowledge that needs to be tapped. Here, students decide what, how much, and at what pace they must learn, and of course, they must always be right! This dangerously tips towards becoming egocentric, where the teacher may have to yield too much of their leadership.

Shifting power to the great thing!

Educationist and philosopher Parker J Palmer, in his book *The Courage to Teach* beautifully presents the idea of a subject-centred classroom, where neither the teacher reigns supreme nor does the student. He says that we must put a *third thing* at the centre of the pedagogical circle – the subject, which he calls *the great thing*.

“The great thing is so alive that teacher can turn to student or student to teacher, and either can make a

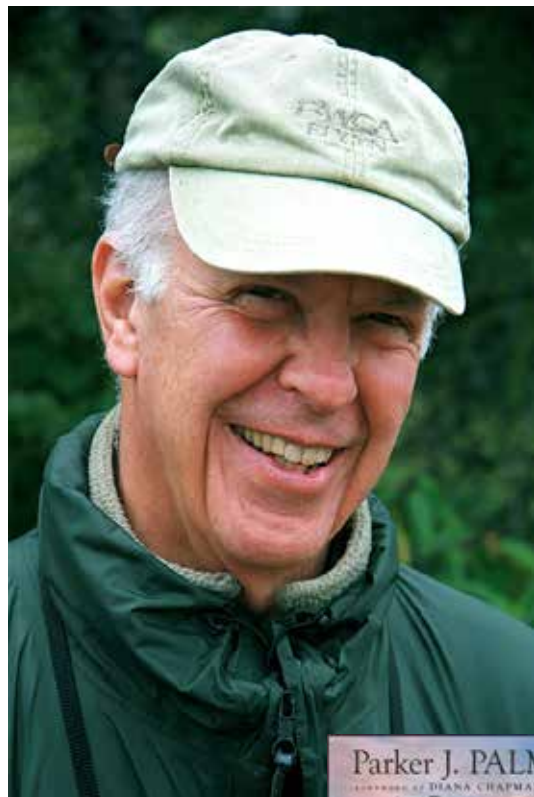
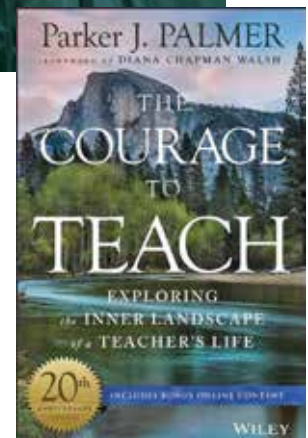


Photo: Sharon L. Palmer
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claim on the other in the name of that great thing. Here, teacher and students have a power beyond themselves to contend with – the power of a subject that transcends our self-absorption and refuses to be reduced to our claims about it.”

In a subject-centric classroom, the teacher’s task is to give *the great thing* an independent voice – a capacity to speak. When the *great thing* speaks for itself, the tension of power between a teacher and their students organically collapses. A subject-centric classroom does not ignore the student, but it opens up a world larger than their own experiences, egos, and personal boundaries and it is the teacher, who stimulates connections between the subject, the self, and the world, which arises from their passion for the subject.

The great thing!

In the July issue, I had touched upon the idea of power between teachers and students and how dialogue with students brings some semblance of equality in the relationship. I also extensively wrote about the importance of making connections beyond academic objectives and bringing the outside world inside the classroom. How to navigate these conversations is where *the great thing* lies.

A skilled preschool teacher, through a simple story about a cow causing a traffic jam, can successfully bring to life a world of facts, imagination, social norms, language, numbers, and science. A math teacher, truly passionate about their subject can help you see patterns in almost anything around you. A language teacher will not focus on the meaning of words in a poem but on that one verse, which will

reveal the bare truth behind the poet’s intention, forever changing the way you read poetry.

Every discipline has a core idea, an internal logic, a patterned way of relating to the world around it, which is why disciplines are divided the way they are. Science has its own foundational system of thought, just as language does too. Teachers must invest their time in understanding the nature of their own discipline to be able to see it as this *great thing* that can be honoured rightfully. This is the only way in which our students can be taught “how to think like historians or biologists or literary critics rather than merely how to lip sync the conclusions others have reached” (Palmer, 1998).

Shifting focus on the subject and the nature of the discipline can develop capacities of thinking that have degenerated over decades of systemic oppression. While science should teach us scientific discoveries, it must also teach us the nature of science, because that is what will develop critical thinking. Teaching history cannot only be about the content in our textbooks constantly changing with political agendas, but must be about the nature of how history is written as well. This system of teaching and learning can liberate both the teacher and the student from the oppressive structures that limit access to knowledge, which is where power truly lies.

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Lessons from history – the importance of alliances

Prachi Lahiri

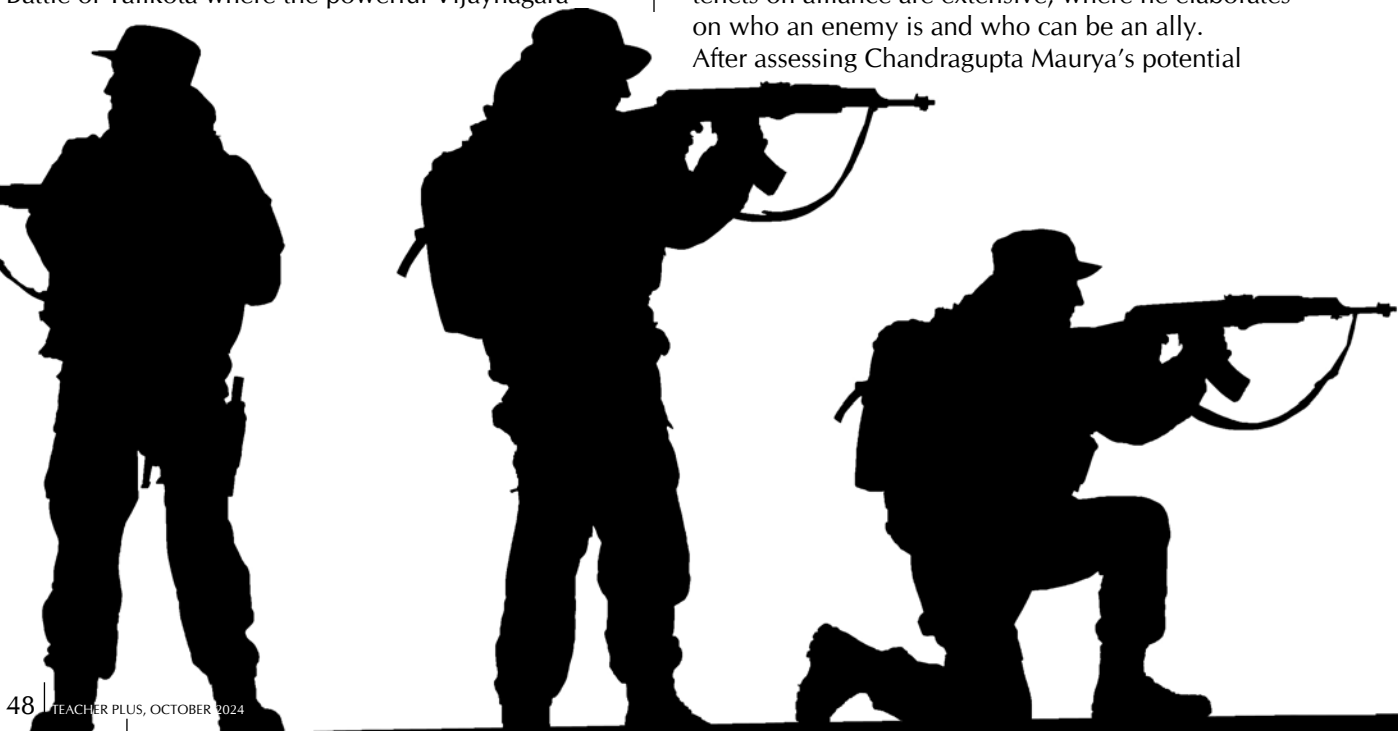
Lessons learnt from history can make our present and future better. So, the crux lies in applying the insights gained from history. If history is locked in the past and not made relevant in today's world, then it remains a story that is told and retold. Therefore, while we teach about the wars in history, unless we highlight what we learnt from them, we are just narrating a saga of valour, victory, violence, and vindictiveness. The importance of allies in any war cannot be overstated, as alliances play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of conflicts. Wars have been won because of good allies and lost due to their absence. Lessons on alliances teach children a valuable and important life skill about the necessity to build a network of friends and supporters.

While writing about wars in history, the focus is usually on the cause of the conflict, its course, and the result. We hardly highlight the importance of coalitions. History is fraught with examples where battles have been won not by brute force, but through alliances and negotiations. The notorious Battle of Talikota where the powerful Vijaynagara

Empire fell to the confederacy of the four kings of Ahmednagar, Golconda, Bijapur, and Bidar is a glaring example. The effects of this loss were devastating for the Vijaynagara Empire. It was looted, burnt, and plundered for months together.

A successful alliance depends on several key factors. Primary among these is the presence of a strong and secure leader. The second crucial element involves a spirit of give-and-take or collaboration; it should never be one-sided. In a sustainable and thriving alliance, each member holds significant stakes, fostering a sense of ownership. The third vital aspect is inclusiveness among diverse groups, where team spirit prevails over individual interests. Dynasties that sustain over a long time are built upon collaboration and alliances; once these foundations are weakened, the dynasty collapses. All these elements are evident in the mighty Mauryan and Mughal Empires.

Under the able guidance of Chanakya, Chandragupta Maurya established the Mauryan Empire. Chanakya's tenets on alliance are extensive, where he elaborates on who an enemy is and who can be an ally. After assessing Chandragupta Maurya's potential



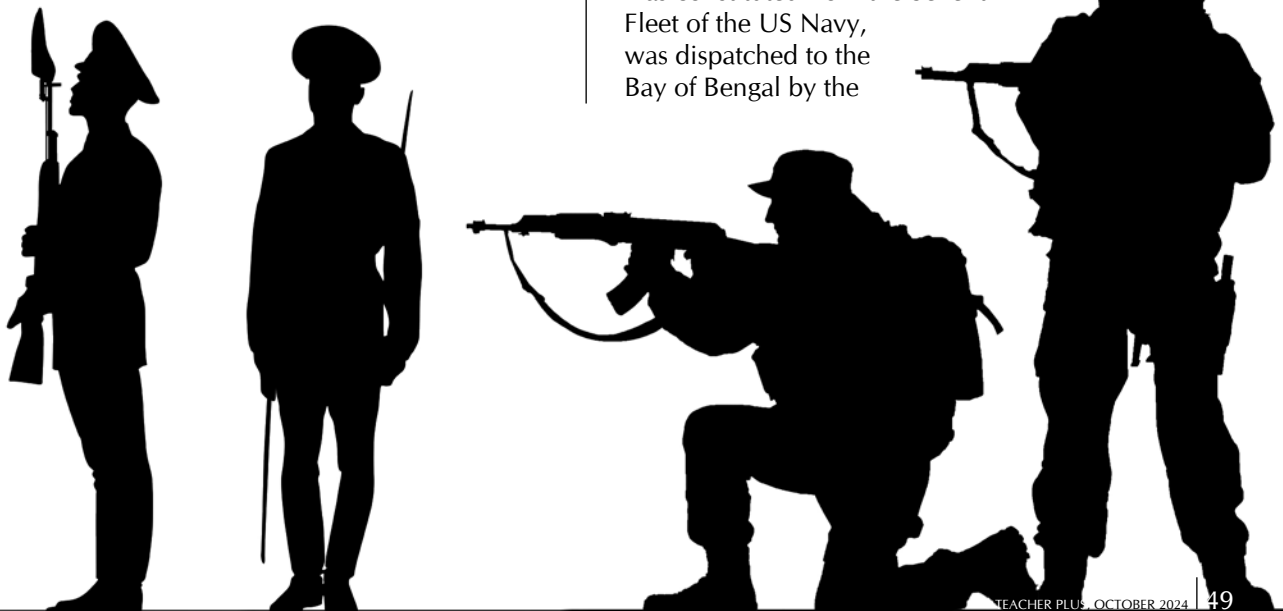
adversaries and allies, Chanakya methodically calculated their mindset and anticipated their actions. When power was asserted through calculative planning, the Mauryan Empire thrived. However, when Ashoka conquered through coercion, sidelining the interests of smaller kingdoms and tribes, the dynasty fell apart within a few decades of his demise. Similarly, when Akbar forged an alliance with the Rajputs, embracing and adapting their customs and beliefs, it secured the Mughal Empire. Conversely, Aurangzeb's pursuit of one-upmanship and intolerance gradually eroded the wealth and power of the Mughals.

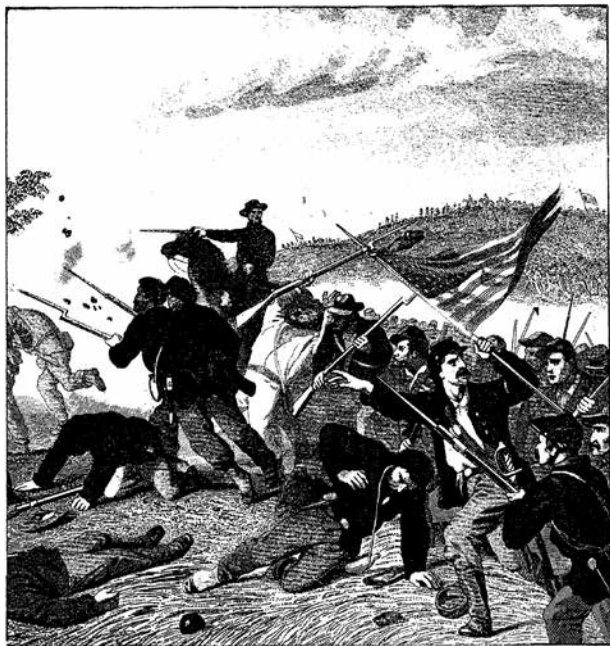
Allies provide a numerical advantage, increasing the size and strength of the combined forces. This can be critical in both offensive and defensive operations, allowing for a more formidable and resilient military presence. The Battle of Waterloo marked Napoleon's ultimate defeat and brought an end to 23 years of conflict between France and various European powers. This decisive engagement occurred during the Hundred Days of Napoleon's restoration, where the battle unfolded between Napoleon's 72,000 troops and the combined forces of the Duke of Wellington's allied army, consisting of 68,000 soldiers from British, Dutch, Belgian, and German units, along with approximately 45,000 Prussians.

Alliances enable the sharing of resources such as manpower, equipment, intelligence, and technology. This pooling of resources can enhance the overall effectiveness of the allied forces and compensate for individual weaknesses. Another example of this is seen in the Third Battle of Panipat that occurred on January 14, 1761. It involved the Maratha Empire facing a coalition comprising the King of Afghanistan,

Ahmad Shah Durrani, along with two Indian allies – the Rohilla Afghans of the Doab and Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Oudh. The conflict saw the Marathas, equipped with French-supplied artillery and cavalry, confronting the heavy cavalry and mounted artillery of the Afghans and Rohillas. This battle is renowned as one of the largest engagements in the 18th century, with perhaps the highest number of fatalities reported on a single day in a classic formation battle between two armies. Sadashivrao Bhau led the Marathas, gathering an army of 45,000-60,000, accompanied by around 200,000 non-combatants, including pilgrims heading to Hindu holy sites. Shuja-ud-Daula's decision to join the Afghan-Rohilla coalition in late July, due to strategic considerations and a desire to align with the 'army of Islam,' was a significant setback for the Marathas, as Shuja provided crucial financial support to the Afghans. The outcome of the battle was that the Marathas lost. Thus, allies can provide strategic depth by offering bases, logistical support, and access to territories, thereby extending the reach and flexibility of military operations. This can be crucial in terms of launching coordinated attacks or securing supply lines.

Allies can provide diplomatic and economic support, strengthening a nation's position on the global stage. This support can include political backing, economic aid, and trade agreements, which can be instrumental in sustaining a war effort over the long term. The Soviet Union actively supported India both politically and militarily during the 1971 Bangladesh war, deploying two groups of cruisers and destroyers along with a nuclear-armed submarine in response to the American military presence in the Bay of Bengal. The Task Force 74, which was constituted from the Seventh Fleet of the US Navy, was dispatched to the Bay of Bengal by the





Battle of Waterloo

Nixon administration during the peak of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. The Indo-Soviet treaty provided India with protection against potential Chinese intervention in support of Pakistan during the conflict. Recognizing the inevitability of armed Indian intervention and the secession of East Pakistan, Pakistan initiated Operation Chengiz Khan on December 3, officially commencing hostilities in the Indo-Pak War of 1971. In response, India adopted a defensive military strategy on the western front and launched a massive, coordinated, and decisive offensive on the eastern front. On December 5, the United States initiated efforts for a UN-sponsored ceasefire, but the USSR vetoed them twice in the Security Council. India formally acknowledged the independence of Bangladesh on December 16.

Different nations may possess unique strengths, capabilities, or expertise in specific areas, such as technology, intelligence, or special force operations. Allies can bring these specialized skills to the coalition, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the military campaign. The presence of strong alliances can have a psychological impact on both the allies and the opposing forces. It can boost morale, create a sense of unity, and demonstrate a collective resolve, which can be demoralizing for the enemy. The existence of powerful alliances can serve as a deterrent, discouraging potential aggressors from initiating hostilities. The knowledge that an attack on one member of an alliance may trigger a collective response can contribute to regional and global

stability. Allies are crucial not only during war but also in the post-conflict phase. Coordinated efforts among allies in the aftermath of a war can contribute to the stabilization of the region, reconstruction efforts, and the establishment of a peace that is more sustainable.

Taking cues from history, focusing on building a network of allies can open doors to new opportunities, whether in personal or professional life. Networking allows one to connect with people who may have valuable knowledge, resources, or connections that can benefit us. Interacting with a diverse group of people exposes one to different perspectives, ideas, and experiences. This can broaden one's understanding of the world and help develop a better-rounded and informed perspective. Having a network of allies provides a safety net. Knowing that there are people who support and believe in you can boost resilience and help overcome setbacks. The ongoing Israel-Gaza war is a testament of failure of diplomacy where around 1,200 innocent Israeli citizens were killed by the Hamas terrorist outfit and in retaliation nearly 40,000 Gaza civilians including women and children have lost their lives. The big powers of the world are either silent or mute in their approach and the loss of lives continues.

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Make wonder a part of the curriculum

Aruna Sankaranarayanan

In *The Demon-haunted World*, famed astronomer Carl Sagan observes that kindergartners and first-graders are eager and enthused about learning. “Provocative and insightful questions bubble out of them,” he notes. But much to his dismay, 12th graders don’t display the same curiosity or zest for learning. “They’ve lost much of the wonder,” he laments. Though children are born with a proclivity to wonder, why does it diminish for many children after years of formal schooling? How can educators harness the science of awe to help children sustain and nourish this inherent capacity?

What is awe and where to find it

Psychologist Dacher Keltner exhorts us to inject awe into our lives and into those of our children. He likens awe or wonder to a “mental state of openness, questioning, curiosity.” In his book, *Awe*, Keltner defines awe as “The feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world.” Through his painstaking research, he has unpacked the mysteries behind this powerful emotion and distilled a science of “everyday wonder.”



Vastness may be exemplified physically, temporally, or semantically. A panoramic view from a mountain top, the fossil of a dinosaur, and the inherent complexity of cellular life evoke a sense of vastness in different ways. Keltner has identified eight domains in which awe may manifest. These are nature, collective movement or effervescence, music, art and visual design, mystical experiences, encounters with life and death, human virtue, and epiphanies. So, awe may be experienced in diverse contexts and ways. Be it a spectacular sunset, a mesmerizing dance ballet, a bone-tingling symphony, a sublime painting, the gurgle of a baby, or the kindness of a stranger.

In her book, *The Awakened Brain*, psychologist, Lisa Miller, argues that every person is endowed with an awakened brain or “a natural capacity to perceive a greater reality.” Whether we identify as religious or not, we all have the “neural circuitry” to experience spirituality, and a “feeling of awe” is one manifestation.

Impact and benefits of awe

When we experience awe, our default self or the ego diminishes and we are more open to noticing and appreciating connections, thereby making us more cooperative and creative. Additionally, awe enhances our happiness and health, and provides a “pathway to healing” when we are struck by tragedy or trauma, making us more resilient.

Keltner describes another study in which some backpackers were asked to perform the Remote Associates Test before hiking up a trail, whereas others were given the test after being on the trail for four days. The latter group performed 50% better on the test that tapped different “kinds of reasoning.” An example of an item on this test involves finding a word that relates to three given words (e.g., ‘age’, ‘mile’ and ‘sand’ are connected by the word ‘stone’).

When people experience awe, they tend to feel a dissolution of the individual ego while merging with “something much larger.” The default self, that typically operates in our daily activities, assumes that each person is “distinct from others,” likes to be in charge or control of our lives, and is achievement-oriented. When the default self “reigns too strongly” or when we are too preoccupied with our own lives, we may fall prey to self-doubt, anxiety and rumination. In fact, Miller finds that the brains of people who practice spirituality are “thicker and stronger in exactly the same regions that weaken and wither in depressed brains.”

In one study, Keltner and his colleagues asked participants to draw themselves on graph paper. In the control condition, the participants were in Fisherman’s Wharf, a fun place in San Francisco. For the experimental or awe condition, participants had just gazed at the “expansive view of Yosemite Valley.” Participants in the awe condition drew themselves much smaller compared to those in the control condition, leading Keltner to conclude that awe results in a “small self.”

In another study, participants were exposed to an awe-inducing stimulus, which was the skeleton of a T. rex. In the control condition, participants simply looked down a hallway. Subsequently, all participants were asked to complete a set of 20 sentences that began with “I AM ____.” While people in the control group expressed individual identities and traits, those in the awe group provided answers that reflected collective identities such as being human, a living being, or belonging to a



particular group. Other studies have found that awe also promotes more altruistic behaviour in people.

Keltner also cites a study conducted in Japan where participants were shown awe-inducing videos while their brains were being scanned. The experience of awe led to diminished activation of the default mode network (DMN), a region of the brain associated with “self-criticism, anxiety and even depression.” Interestingly, awe experiences provide an ironic perspective to life. On the one hand, Keltner avers that awe experiences “can make us feel that our life’s work” is not as significant as our default selves typically believe. On the other hand, awe experiences also imbue us with “purpose and possibility.”

What teachers can do

“Childhoods rich with awe are good for the child,” argues Keltner. In one study, five-year-olds who watched a nature video interacted more imaginatively with a new toy compared to children in the control group. Keltner also finds that when children experience awe on a regular basis, it arouses “their curiosity in school” and may even result in “better academic performance,” especially for children from underprivileged backgrounds.



So, what can teachers do to inject more awe into children’s lives? Contrary to what people think, the experience of awe does not require travel to exotic locales or the purchase of expensive concert tickets. Awe can be felt in quotidian activities, once we start seeking it. Keltner recommends awakening children’s senses by helping them to slow down and to look, to listen, and to feel the world around them with intention but without necessarily labelling, classifying, or judging, which fall under the purview of the “default self.”

Taking children on nature walks is one way to help them discover wonders in the wild. Help them cultivate an appreciation of vastness by examining the complexities hidden within the whorls of a flower. Emphasize the interrelatedness of things as the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, has famously remarked that “there is a cloud floating” in every “sheet of paper.”

Even something as mundane as playing in a school band where all the performers are in sync can be awe-inspiring. Ensure that activities like art, dance, and theatre are integral to the curriculum. Expose children to a gamut of art and sport forms as different children are likely to find awe in different experiences. When you plan excursions for students, introduce them to artefacts, monuments, or natural forms that may elicit awe.

Schedule a time when the class shares their awe experiences with each other. You may even coax them to journal about their awe adventures. By infusing their lives with more awe, you may help children retain their sense of wonder.

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My first lessons as a teacher

Shamma Kalodi

They say grown-ups tend to forget what it is like to be a child. By the end of this year, I might forget what it is like to be a first-time teacher. So here I am putting down my reflections, my very first lessons as a teacher.

It was not a walk in the park. On my first day, I entered a half-empty classroom without a syllabus or any knowledge of the course I was to teach. I was anxious and insecure, but managed to entertain the class for half an hour or so. It was a perfect mix of first day energy, chaos, casualness, and lightheartedness. As a recent postgraduate, I should also add that I was thrilled that I signed the attendance register for guest faculty members along with those who had 'Dr' before their names.

It has been three weeks since that day. I now know what I am to teach and I am relieved that the initial nervousness has given way to comfort within the classroom's physical space. A sense of meaning and purpose has started to emerge, but at the same time, I am baffled by the inefficiencies of the system and the academic culture.

I had not really planned on becoming a teacher. This decision was taken purely due to convenience and personal circumstances. That does not mean that I don't like teaching. I had simply never considered teaching as a profession because I wasn't sure that I would 'fit in'.

So, here are the key takeaways from my first few weeks as a teacher:

Acquaintance with the structure

- Navigating the bureaucratic labyrinth and completing clerical jobs adds to extra work hours and is time-consuming, resulting in a loss of time that could have been spent on extensive reading and research.
- There is no proper guidance for new teachers, which is very frustrating. A lack of robust structure and unnecessary procedures to follow mean that

new teachers have to nag people to get their work done.

- The idea of teaching seems to have been reduced to marking checklists given by organizations like the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which rank higher education institutions on the quality of education they provide. The extravaganza of college celebrations in Kerala during NAAC visits is a story for another time. Several YouTube videos provide testimonials for the same.
- The hasty implementation of the four-year degree without proper planning is turning into a trial-and-error game that is unfolding now.

Photos courtesy: Shamma Kalodi



Taking advice from other faculty members/one's teachers

One of my professors used to ask us ice-breaker questions like, "What is that one superpower you wish you had?" I found that this technique did not work in my class and students were generally hesitant to respond. When you seek advice from other faculty members on how to approach your classes, you get varied suggestions. While it is



all right to take their advice, or even try our old teachers' styles, it is wiser to rely on student feedback (if possible), and act according to keen observation, reflection, and develop your own teaching style.

Finding the tipping point

Wanting to be friendly and approachable, while staying within the limits of what constitutes 'professionalism', is a common dilemma. Drawing a careful boundary between the two takes time and effort and must be done cautiously.

Planning the curriculum

- A syllabus of just two pages does not equate to a teaching plan. Classroom debates, creative assignments, and other activities have to be incorporated into the plan to make the classes

lively and engaging, while keeping in mind the evaluation requirements and upcoming deadlines or exam schedules.

- The plan needs to be executed with proper organization and time management – crucial skills to survive in this profession. However, there are no rules set in stone, and sometimes, one may have to cut some slack and act according to the situation at hand.

Extensive reading

Teaching is also a journey of lifelong learning and overcoming barriers. The syllabus handed to me was totally different from what I had studied for my post-graduation course, and therefore preparing for the class involved exploring a whole set of new ideas.

Let it flow with time

In the beginning, it felt like I was inept at the job, and students' lack of response to my efforts to engage them seemed to be a direct reflection of that belief. With time, I realized that students also take time to become familiar with a new teacher and a new way of teaching. Changes happen slowly and steadily.

Change of structure and change of mind

A public university setup differs from an aided college. I had always believed that the academic culture of the former is way better than that of the latter (and a foreign university degree stands superior to degrees offered by any Indian university) because time in a public university provides one with broader exposure to the world of academia with opportunities to interact and build networks with fellow students from diverse backgrounds, notable scholars, activists, and other famous personalities, and access better facilities. While it is partially true, my experience, so far, has made me rethink this conviction as I see students here in local colleges engaged in projects, activities, and programmes that are more rooted in their social and political realities.

Nevertheless, university culture seems less orthodox regarding age-old practices like ringing screeching bells or ritual forms of respect offered to teachers by the students.

Social adaptation

A student-to-teacher transition is also marked by social acceptance. One learns to adjust to new ways of being addressed, new standards of attire, new norms, new ways of being perceived and a new form of respect from society.

Staying updated

One can only enter a classroom, especially to teach a course like journalism, by ensuring that one has a decent understanding of current affairs. Whether reading books, or newspapers, or watching informative content, a teacher has to follow what she preaches.

Sensitivity to diversity

Students vary in their psychological, socio-cultural, and religious makeup, and one has to be mindful and considerate of these differences. For instance, a student in my class cannot watch bloodshed, another dislikes watching scenes of physical intimacy, a third student refrains from watching any movies at all. The syllabus insists on screening specific films, but sometimes, I have to let a few of them retract to the textbook learning method.

One can also bring different points of view for a class discussion but respect the individual rights of students in taking the final call when it comes to particular debates.

Use of aids and the 'right' way of teaching

- Your learning style can reflect your teaching style. But make sure to bridge your teaching style with that of the students' fluctuating attention levels, interests, and learning capabilities.

From my observation, if one does not give notes, students tend to refer to guides, which offer only capsules of topics without any details. If one asks them to write notes, they either open their phones pretending to write or do not write at all. Making a generation that is used to reels and short forms of content read or write is an arduous task. So, I decided to give them more detailed notes than the guides they bought.

- Using PPTs with text also seemed less efficient, so using PPTs was restricted to showing images and videos. Surprisingly, the old-school chalkboard system worked better for highlighting words or terminologies.

Relationship with other teachers

Healthy boundaries, friendship, kindness, and proper communication make it a lot easier to navigate the academic sphere.

It is easier to point fingers at students' lethargy, systemic failures, and other issues, such as the lack of academic efficiency. But we hardly look at ourselves for the possibilities of small changes, and sometimes it is wiser to act individually and responsibly towards those changes, as not all of us can afford to be rebels. Being a teacher is to explore these small possibilities that can make a difference.

The author is a post-graduate in Media Studies and teaches Complementary Journalism courses for Literature students at an autonomous college in Kerala. She can be reached at <shammakalodi36813@gmail.com>.



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A new vision for education

Neerja Singh

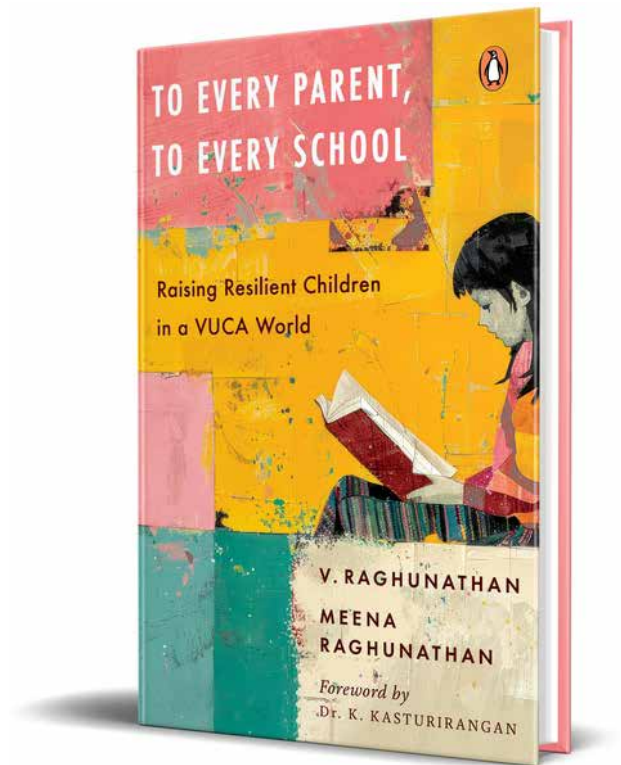
This book is a compelling page-turner that qualifies as mandatory reading for any adult overseeing the young – teachers, parents, bosses, policymakers, social commentators, professional speakers... this is essential literature.

One, it explores, informs, and educates the adult mandate of leaving behind a generation more potent, productive, and prosperous than the one before. Two, it is a heartfelt call to action. And three, it stays reassuringly relevant in urging educational rethink and reform. It is, in fact, a ready reckoner for change. The authors train their lens on the contemporary educational paradigms, weighing both the strengths and weaknesses.

The book is not limited to academic concerns alone; the emotional, social, and ethical aspects of child development are included in the exploration. The authors emphasize the significance of nurturing a well-rounded personality based on values, empathy, and critical thinking over rote learning and grades. This comes in as a breath of fresh air to an environment where education appears to have lost its meaning.

Real-life anecdotes, detailed research, and global examples hold the reader's interest. It is heartening that the book advocates for a collaborative relationship rather than a competitive one as the best fit for the contemporary world.

For instance, the authors share a poignant story about their teacher who embodied the principles they advocate for. This teacher was known for his unconventional methods and deep empathy. Instead of merely focusing on rote learning and standardized tests, he emphasized the importance of critical thinking and personal growth. He encouraged students to pursue their passions and to view education as a tool for personal development rather than just a means to an end. The authors reflect on how this teacher's approach inspired them and influenced their educational philosophy, reinforcing



To Every Parent To Every School

Authors: V. Raghunathan and Meena Raghunathan

Publisher: Penguin Random House India

Pages: 384

Price: Rs. 699

Where to buy: <https://www.amazon.in/Every-Parent-School-Resilient-Children/dp/0670098582>

the book's argument for a more holistic approach to teaching.

One of the most impactful sections of the book is its emphasis on customized learning. The authors argue that recognizing and cultivating the uniqueness of each child is crucial for their development. They recount a story from a school in Singapore that implemented personalized learning plans for each student. Instead of a one-size-fits-all curriculum,

teachers worked closely with students to tailor their education to their individual strengths and interests. The result was a more engaged and motivated student body, highlighting the benefits of an approach that respects and nurtures each child's distinct abilities.

The book also highlights the emotional, social, and ethical dimensions of child development, underscoring the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals. The authors argue that education should go beyond academic excellence and focus on developing values such as empathy and integrity. They present real-life anecdotes to illustrate this point, including a touching example of a school in Finland where students are encouraged to engage in community service from a young age. This approach not only helps students understand the value of giving back but also fosters a sense of responsibility and social awareness.

The authors frame the educational landscape as a dynamic and multifaceted environment. They stress that "schools are not just places where children learn; they are communities where children grow, where values are instilled, and where futures are shaped." This perspective sets the tone for a comprehensive exploration of the parent-school relationship.

One of the central themes of the book is the evolving role of parents. The authors argue that "parental involvement is no longer a choice but a necessity for a child's success in today's competitive world." They emphasize that parents must be proactive rather than passive participants in their child's education. This is not merely about attending PTA meetings or helping with homework; it's about actively engaging with teachers, understanding school policies, and fostering a collaborative environment.

Communication is a recurring theme throughout the book. The authors advocate for open, honest, and respectful dialogue between parents and schools. They argue that "effective communication is the cornerstone of a successful parent-school partnership." The authors offer practical advice on how to approach teachers and school administrators, highlighting the importance of being informed and articulate.

For instance, they recount a case where a parent effectively resolved a conflict over a child's academic performance by scheduling a series of meetings with

the teacher and presenting a well-organized account of the child's progress. This example underscores their belief that "being prepared and respectful can turn potential conflicts into productive discussions."

The authors draw on examples from around the world, showcasing educational models that prioritize collaboration over competition. For instance, they discuss Finland's education system, where students are encouraged to work together rather than compete against each other. This approach, they argue, better prepares students for the realities of the contemporary world, where collaboration and teamwork are often more valuable than individual achievement.

The book also includes Action Points, which are practical takeaways for readers. These are presented in easily digestible boxes throughout the text, making it easy for readers to apply the book's insights to their own lives. One of my favourites is Action Pointer 10: Helping Children to Manage Mistakes. They make a profound statement on page 119, "Mistakes are not the mountains they are made out to be."

The layout and design invite the reader in with these Action Points in boxes and plenty of quotes, stories, and bullet points. The book is a clarion call for a new vision to be brought upon the country's education ecosystem. And the onus for this is decidedly borne by the collective. The world is too diverse and dynamic for isolated shooting stars. What we need is a bright and inclusive galaxy in which the minds and hearts of the next generation can sparkle and twinkle!

This book renewed my faith in the power of education to change the world for better. *To Every Parent, To Every School* is a singular service to mankind.

The reviewer is a generational diversity speaker, author of five generational books and an Oxford University Press teacher trainer. She uses her 37 years in media and education to speak on working with GenZ at multinational companies, educational institutions, and armed forces conferences. Her TEDx talk entitled "The Unaffordable cost of Generation Gap" has gathered wide spread attention. She can be reached at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/neerja-singh/>.

The library as a space for art exploration

Sanika Dhakephalkar



Photos courtesy: Sanika Dhakephalkar

As educators, teachers, and facilitators, have you noticed how most children hesitate to express themselves through art? Where do you think this reluctance stems from?

Children do not have freedom in art classes and are expected to copy a given image exactly. As such, 'observation drawing' focuses on the 'observation' of certain rules rather than experiencing and sharing of experiences (Atkinson 1996). The library can counter this practice and become a space where children have the freedom to create their own forms of expression and build their own narratives.

I have been conducting visual arts programmes for the Bookworm Library and its various initiatives. I usually begin a programme by making and 'reading' (interpreting) abstract art. If the first thing that children notice when they encounter art is that it can be absolutely anything they want it to be, and that they can interpret it in their own ways, they don't

push art away. Together, the children and I have created and interpreted abstract art inspired by Mehli Gobhai, SH Raza, and Anne Herbauts. Looking at, interpreting, and naming abstract works of art help children experience freedom within themselves. In nearly all visual arts sessions that I have conducted in schools, I have encountered hesitation among children in freely expressing what they feel. It becomes important for the facilitator then to remind children that they are viewing and making art in an environment (the library) that does not need binary answers from them. At the same time, these sessions also validate children's thought-worlds without an adult having to tell them what to do. School libraries can therefore become spaces where children can be encouraged to exercise their curiosity about each other and the world. A facilitator does not need to be an expert in art to conduct these sessions as long as they are themselves curious and have the spirit of learning, research, and expression. One of the ways this curiosity can be harnessed, especially in

schools, is by helping children explore their everyday environments followed by browsing and referencing books about nature and creating artworks or books to record their observations and experiences.



Art-making in the library

It gives me immense joy to work with children and offer them possibilities of creating and telling stories without having to rely on words, to see them shed the limitations of acquired languages and interpret the meanings of their creations in their own ways.



At Bookworm's community library in Chimbel, Goa, the children and I made our own scroll books. I first introduced children to tempera paint*. I let the children explore this medium on their own and did not tell them how they should or could use these paints. I simply gave them a topic and divided them into groups where they painted their own interpretations of it, discovering how the medium works along the way. In the second session, I introduced them to the book *Tsunami* by Joydeb and Moyna Chitrakar. We read it together and explored the subject, the artwork, the history, and the process of creating Patua scrolls. After this, I divided the children into groups and asked them to make scroll books about their neighbourhoods. We created the front and back covers for their books using a mount board. The children designed cover pages and even wrote blurbs for the back cover. The books explored various topics such as changes in the neighbourhood over time, how the neighbourhood looked during the monsoon, what one could expect to see on a walk in the neighbourhood, a story of the library over the years in the community, and a fictional story about children from the neighbourhood who wanted to visit a zoo. The children's excitement at having made books based on their own lives and experiences was palpable and as a facilitator and as someone for whom Goa is a recent home, I was able to learn a lot about the children and Chimbel through these books.

It is only after this that we approached observation drawing inspired by the book *Ish* by Peter H Reynolds, a beautiful book that encourages the reader to not worry about whether something looks exactly right, and to draw anyway. I saw that the children did not hesitate to look around and draw the mountain, a broken plastic chair, the water tank, clothes drying on a line, a broken slipper lying nearby, the tree next to us, and us on our library space on the ground in the middle of all this. Their drawings were not exact copies of what they saw around themselves, but they did not hesitate to attempt the drawing and they welcomed not only theirs but their friends' interpretations of the same scene.

Visual arts and the library

All this and more can be replicated in the school library as well. Children who come to listen to and share stories are more likely to tell their own stories when offered the opportunities and the tools. Readers

*A water based paint similar to poster colours, but different in composition and texture. It is translucent while painting but opaque with a chalky texture when dry.



who are used to delving into stories will also be open to exercises of 'reading' art. Similarly, engaging with different art forms, movements, and artists can open up deeper connections with library collections and books, as children expand their range of perspectives. Book-making exercises open up ideas about the book as an object and bring children closer to understanding what goes into building a book and a story, which in turn brings them closer to the books they read. The connection of the library to visual arts is unique in this way.

We hope to be able to take this approach of visual arts in the library to many library educators and children. The selection of media plays an important role here and a library educator must keep the following things in mind while choosing the media:

- No pencils or erasers. Use paint and soft pastels and other exciting and forgiving media.
- Avoid A4 and 'official' sized paper. Use squares or other fun shapes.
- Incorporate exploration with material and experimentation with different media.

Apart from the media, a shift in the educator's mindset is vital. The following things must be considered while approaching art-making with children in the library:

- Pose your questions and tasks in a way that allows each child the space to bring their own voice to the artwork. Avoid tasks that involve copying and replication.

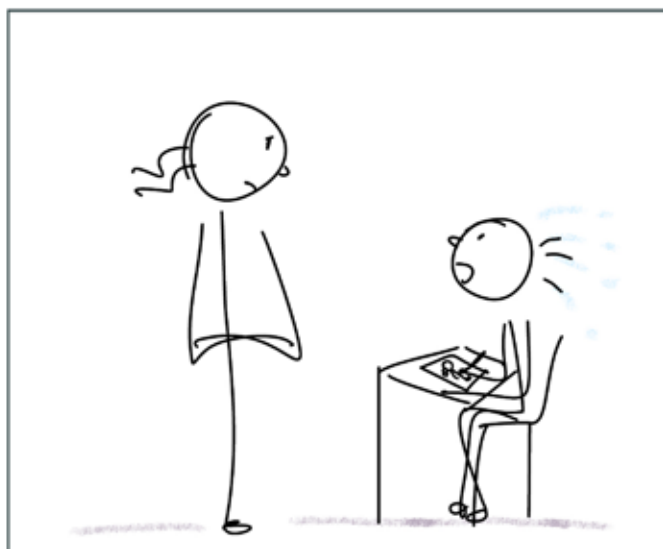
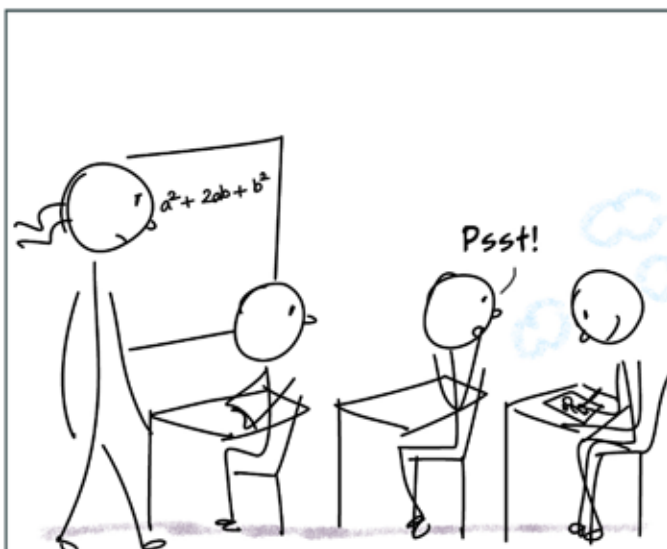
- Appreciate and affirm at each step, set open-ended goals, help them reach where they want to go.
- Think of yourself as an artist and bring that same consideration to the children. Explore, experiment, and research with the chosen media before the session – your familiarity with the media will help them.
- Encourage interpretation. Ask children what they see in their own and each others' art, what their favourite paintings are, why they like what they like, etc.
- Build confidence in expression, then move towards drawing from observation if you wish to do so at all.
- Be inspired by your collection!

Reference: Atkinson, D. (2002). *Art in Education: Identity and practice*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA62600077>

The author is an artist, educator, poet, and translator based in Goa and currently leads the Visual Arts Program at Bookworm Library. They can be reached at [<sanika@bookwormgoa.in>](mailto:sanika@bookwormgoa.in).

THE LIFELONG LEARNER: MAKING AN IMPACT

IT'S HARD TO MEASURE THE
IMPACT YOU MAKE



BUT EVERYTHING YOU SAY



MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Indian teachers in Bhutan

A cross-border story of love and respect

Chintan Girish Modi

Did you know that several generations of Bhutanese students have been taught by Indian school teachers? I had no clue until I visited Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, for the Drukyl's Literature and Arts Festival in the first week of August 2024. At the festival's opening dinner hosted at the Indian Embassy by Ambassador Sudhakar Dalela and his wife Namrata Dalela, a stray comment about Indian teachers in Bhutan from one of the attendees got me curious and I made up my mind to find out more.

The festival was hosted by the non-profit organization Bhutan Echoes, under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother of Bhutan Gyalum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck in partnership with the Indian Embassy and the India-Bhutan Foundation.

To my utter surprise, the highlight of the evening – at least for me – was a moving speech by the Queen

Mother. The warmth in her words left me teary-eyed. She said, "Bhutan and India share a sacred and special bond, nurtured by our monarchs and successive Indian leaders. Despite our differences in size and geography, we find common ground in our cultures and shared values. This enduring relationship is characterized by friendship and mutual respect."

She spoke about strengthening people-to-people ties through literature and arts alongside official relations. "India holds and will always hold a special place in the hearts of the Bhutanese people," she added. It was not just a formal speech. There was depth and feeling in her words. It was only later that I read about her experience as a student at an Indian boarding school in her book titled *Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan* (2018).

Photo courtesy: Drukyl's Literature and Arts Festival



She writes, “We were among the early batches of Bhutanese children who went to India for their education. By the late 1950s, increasingly convinced of the need for educated manpower, the government of Bhutan began to urge people to send their children to study at boarding schools in India, where they would receive a modern education and learn English.”

She and her sister Tshering Pem were sent to St. Helen’s Secondary School in Kurseong, West Bengal, in 1963. Two years earlier, her elder sister Beda and brother Sangay had joined the school. Her grandparents were disappointed about their departure, but her father argued that “an English medium education was essential for the future of all his children.”

What’s refreshing about her account in this book is that she comes across not as royalty but as a regular schoolgirl. She reminisces about the American, Irish, and German nuns who taught her, and the slices of bread and butter that she devoured at tea time with pickles bought in the market. She recalls learning Hindi, Bengali, and Nepali at school, winning prizes for academics, buying chocolate from a tuck shop, not performing well in sports, trying to emulate Indian film stars, and playing a farmer in a dhoti and the Mayor of London in two different school plays. She notes, “A favourite role model was Zeenat Aman, whom I found absolutely gorgeous and the epitome of stylish elegance.”

While I was thrilled to read the Queen Mother’s anecdotes about her student days in India, I was also



Photos: Chintan Girish Modi

keen to hear from Bhutanese people taught by Indian teachers who had moved to Bhutan. I mentioned this to Lhakpa Tamang, one of the numerous car drivers helping delegates commute from one festival venue to another or make it in time for lunch.

He told me that he had Indian teachers for mathematics, chemistry, and physics in the 7th, 8th and 9th grades. “I liked the way they spoke English, and the way they taught us. Their classes were interesting, so we understood quickly and never fell asleep,” he said.

Afterwards, at the festival, I met Chador Tenzin Rabgay, who studies at Royal Thimphu College. He spoke glowingly about his economics teacher from school, Mr. Manna, who had moved from India to Bhutan for that teaching job. He said, “Bhutanese and Indian people have a close relationship, so our teacher used to make comparisons between the two cultures. That made the sessions fun. The learning environment in class was so relaxed. It made me want to study, especially because our teacher was not fixated on theory and also spoke about practical application of ideas.” Now, in college, he has an Indian teacher named Stephen Victor for a subject called strategic management. The pedagogy continues to be engaging. “Most of the learning happens through quizzes. It is very interactive, so we feel like paying attention unlike classes where teachers mainly use PowerPoint presentations,” he added.

Chador Tenzin Rabgay





Tshering Pelden

It turned out that even Tshering Pelden, a senior tour guide from the Department of Tourism in Bhutan, who took all the Indian journalists on a sightseeing trip in Thimphu, was taught by Indian teachers. She grew up in Punakha, which was the capital of Bhutan until 1955.

She said, “Mr. Gaffar Khan was a very nice man from Kerala. He taught me history in the 11th and 12th grades. His teaching was outstanding, and he was a big source of inspiration. We liked him and his subject, so we were never lazy about doing our homework.” Gaffar Khan taught Indian history, Bhutanese history, and world history. She remembers his classes on the Mughal Empire with great fondness. She and her schoolmates stay in touch with their Indian teacher via WhatsApp and Facebook. She says, with pride, “After going to India, he came back to visit us once. All his former students took care of his accommodation, meals, and transport. Everyone came forward because we wanted to show him our gratitude.”

I was touched by the love with which she spoke about her teacher, and that made me think how rare it is for countries to acknowledge the role of teachers as cultural ambassadors. Luckily, diplomat and author Navtej Sarna, who served as the First Secretary at the Indian Embassy in Bhutan from 1989 to 1992, was also a speaker at the festival. He said, “Some senior ministers in Bhutan have told me that, in the olden days, when transport and communication were limited, many of them used to study in Indian boarding schools. Later, Indian teachers began to come to Bhutan as volunteers and as contractual employees.”

When the Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay was in India on an official visit in March 2024, at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the joint statement put out by both the countries recognized the contribution of Indian teachers in strengthening the teaching of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects in Bhutan.

On the website of *Kuensel*, Bhutan’s national newspaper in English, I stumbled on an article by Karma Cheki and learnt that, when India and Bhutan completed 50 years of diplomatic ties in 2018, several retired Indian teachers who had served in Bhutan were invited as guests of honour on Teacher’s Day. This occasion is celebrated on May 3 in Bhutan to coincide with the birth anniversary of the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck.

My heart was full when I read about how Indian teachers are treated in Bhutan. More recently, in mid-August, when Indian filmmaker Onir’s father Aparesh Dhar passed away, Onir posted a stirring video on Instagram with Bhutanese people offering prayers. Onir spent his childhood in Bhutan, where his father was the principal of Motithang School for 11 years.

Overcome with emotion, Onir wrote, “I am sure he would be smiling seeing the love and respect all his students are giving him across different schools and monasteries in Bhutan.” It was indeed a special moment. The love of students is bigger than any award a teacher can get.

The author is a writer, journalist, and educator based in Mumbai. He can be reached at [<chintan.writing@gmail.com>](mailto:chintan.writing@gmail.com).

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